

The Forces' favourite paper

Amazing story of DFC & Bar pilot

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Win!



Hawk is still flying high

See R'n'R page 5

Win!



ROYAL AIR FORCE

Friday, May 29, 2026
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RAF News



Win!

War hits the Home Front

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**Cosfit 2026
Fit to serve**

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**Football
Stars out for Astra finale**



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**Rugby
Grand Slam win for Amy**



● See page 27

Sky spy

Wedgetail heralds new

surveillance era for UK



Simon Mander

THE FIRST E-7 Wedgetail arrived at Lossiemouth heralding a new era in the UK's ISTAR capability.

Aircraft WT001 will undergo test and evaluation at its future main operating base after being flown to the Moray station by

Boeing and RAF personnel. When this phase is complete, it will be handed over and operated by VIII Sqn alongside the nine-strong fleet of Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft.

Wedgetail delivers long-range surveillance and battle management and already serves with the Royal Australian, Republic of Korea and Turkish Air Forces.

It was met by Station Commander, Gp Capt Sarah Brewin (pictured above), who said: "This marks a significant step in delivering next-generation surveillance and control capabilities."

Boeing E-7 vice-president Stu Voboril said: "The E-7 will provide the UK with the world's most advanced, capable and reliable Airborne Early Warning and Control platform."

BiteSize

“This award shows the viability for a Muslim to work in our Armed Forces,,



Brize Imam, Sqn Ldr Ali Omar, is honoured by Saudi Arabian Islamic uni

See page 5

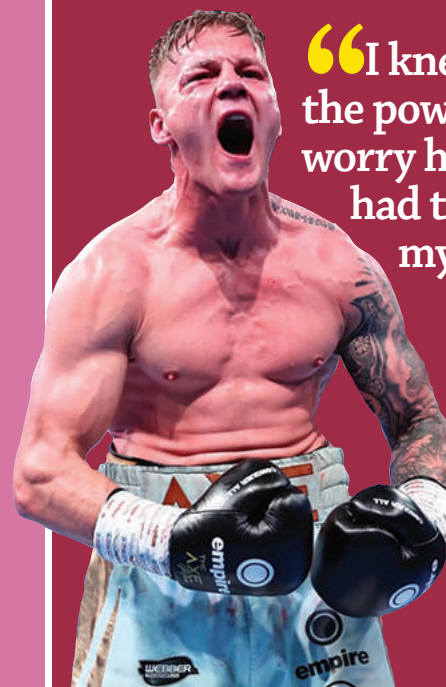
“The great revelation to me was the poetry – he started as a poet,,



Wolf Hall star Anton Lesser explores the work of author Thomas Hardy in new show

See R'n'R page 3

“I knew I had the power to worry him but I had to protect my cut eye,,



Cpl Brad Axe wins his latest pro fight at London's York Hall

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ROYAL AIR FORCE RAF News

RAF News

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‘Reckless’ Putin jets raise NATO tensions

DEFENCE CHIEFS have slammed Putin after two Russian fighters came within metres of a UK Rivet Joint during a mid-air confrontation over the Black Sea.

The Su-35 and Su-27 jets repeatedly intercepted the RAF surveillance aircraft, which was on a routine mission over Nato's eastern flank. The Russian fighters came so close at one point the UK jet's autopilot was disabled, in a move described as 'reckless and dangerous' by Defence Secretary John Healey.

MOD and Foreign Office officials met with the Russian Embassy to condemn the pilots' actions. And Mr Healey warned Putin that the UK will stand firm on its commitment to Nato and maintaining security across Eastern Europe.

He said: "These actions create a serious risk of accidents and



INTERCEPT: The Russian Su-35 which came within metres of a UK Rivet Joint over the Black Sea

potential escalation. Let me be very clear: This incident will not deter the UK's commitment to defend Nato, our allies and our interests from Russian aggression."

The incident is the most

dangerous action against a UK Rivet Joint since 2022 when a Russian aircraft fired a missile over the Black Sea, and comes amid continued Russian aggression and heightened military activity in

Eastern Europe and the High North. The intercepts came just days after the Defence Secretary exposed Russian submarine activity over critical underwater infrastructure in the North Atlantic.

This Week In History



1942 Bomber raids

WINSTON CHURCHILL approves plans for Operation Millennium – the 1,000 bomber raid on the German city of Cologne. More than 2,000 tons of bombs are dropped during the 90-minute attack.



1953 Coronation duty

RAF PERSONNEL join a 10,000-strong military procession from Westminster to Buckingham Palace to mark the Coronation of HM Queen Elizabeth II.



1999 Serb withdrawal

THE SUCCESS of Allied air operations in the Balkans forces the Serbian leadership to withdraw troops from Kosovo.

Extracts from *The Royal Air Force Day By Day* by Air Cdre Graham Pitchfork (The History Press)

WWII pilot is buried 86 years on, thanks to War Detectives



NORTH YORKSHIRE: Lady Charlotte Peel, Honorary Air Cdre of 607 Sqn



RESPECT: Gunners at the ceremony in France for Sqn Ldr George Fidler, inset below

PHOTO: AS1 JESSICA EGLON

By Lynn Dunne

ACROSS THE English Channel, RAF and civilian communities fell silent in honour of a fallen World War II pilot, buried exactly 86 years after his death.

Sqn Ldr George Morley Fidler was laid to rest with full military honours in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission London Cemetery and Extension in France. Borne by personnel from RAF Halton and attended by colleagues from 607 (Co of Durham) Sqn, of which he was Commanding Officer for just three days, Fidler's funeral service was marked with a simultaneous service of memorial at his Great Ayton village home.

Joining the RAF in 1934, Sqn Ldr Fidler's career changed dramatically with the declaration of war in 1939. Sent to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force to help to help resist the German threat, he joined 607 (Co of Durham) Sqn,



just as they were allocated new Hawker Hunter fighters.

Promoted to Squadron Leader on 16 May 1940, and described as an 'exceptional' pilot, Fidler had been Commanding Officer of 607 Sqn for mere days when his Hurricane was one of several shot down whilst patrolling the skies above Cambrai in May 1940.

He was initially believed to have been recovered in the French village of Bachy, where residents tended lovingly to his grave for many years. However, wreckage recovered in 2005 in Oisy-le-Verger – 35 km away from Bachy – bore the serial number P3535, suggesting it came from Fidler's Hurricane.

Further investigation revealed that authorities at the time of Fidler's death had failed to consider two RAF Sergeants who died on the same day, meaning they could not be certain that

the body buried was his.

The headstone in Bachy had his name replaced with 'Unknown Airman'. Sqn Ldr Fidler's name was added to the memorial to the missing.

But his story did not end there. In 2022, work on the Seine-Nord Canal at Oisy-le-Verger in northern France unearthed a Hurricane with the pilot still inside near to where Sqn Ldr Fidler's aircraft was last seen. DNA testing conclusively proved it was him.

The funeral service was organised by MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), also known as the 'MOD War Detectives' – who work to identify the recovered remains of British military casualties.

Nicola Mash of JCCC said: "Although there is no family here today, I like to think that us being here with the RAF represents that close emotional bond.

"These men made the ultimate sacrifice for the life we live today. Even 86 years later, it's important that there is still a team looking for them."

Reading and laying a wreath at the grave of her predecessor was a poignant moment for 607 Sqn's current CO, Sqn Ldr Lorna Wythers.

She said: "He was my predecessor, his name is on the board in the Squadron and we walk past that daily, so to be here today is such an honour. It's incredible to think what he did on his own in that cockpit and the Luftwaffe he was up against. He did an absolutely stellar job."

While Sqn Ldr Fidler was being laid to rest, his home community of Great Ayton in North Yorkshire gathered in memory of the pilot who fulfilled his lifelong dreams of becoming a pilot when he joined the Royal Air Force.

His flying visits to his home of

Great Ayton – sometimes looping the loop before landing in a field – made him a local celebrity.

Residents were joined by personnel from RAF Leeming, 607 Sqn, Johanna Ropner, Lord Lieutenant of North Yorkshire and Lady Charlotte Peel, Honorary Air Cdre of 607 Sqn.

Reverend Sarah Cliff, Vicar of Great Ayton with Easby and Newton under Roseberry, said: "I heard about the funeral a couple of weeks ago and thought we should do something. It's just grown – people want to know this amazing story and about the care that has been shown since he was found. No life is forgotten."

Gp Capt Geordie Lawson, Station Commander RAF Leeming, said: "It was a great honour and privilege to be here today. Services like this are hugely important to remember the ultimate sacrifice that people like Sqn Ldr Fidler made to give us the freedoms we have today."

Hormuz mission

TYPHOONS WILL be deployed to protect a naval mission to secure the Strait of Hormuz.

An extra £115 million has been set aside for the UK-led multinational mission involving up to 40 nations.

Defence Secretary John Healey said: "New funding for autonomous mine-hunting and counter-drone systems, Typhoon jets, and HMS Dragon are strong and clear commitments to strengthen

the confidence of commercial shipping and reduce the burden of the conflict on people at home."

These contributions complement the UK's existing defensive operations with over 1,000 personnel across the region, including counter-drone teams and fast jet squadrons.

The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most critical trade routes, through which a fifth of the world's oil passes.



BULLY FOR YOU: Dave receives Valuable Service Medals from Wg Cdr Williamson

Dave's done

A CIVIL servant who worked at Marham for 49 years has retired from service with the RAF.

Still living nearby, Dave Jarvis joined the Norfolk airbase in 1977 and over the course of his career received three commendations; including one for transforming derelict properties into welfare houses.

Wg Cdr Martin Williamson presented Dave with the MOD Civil Service Valuable Service Awards recognising 15, 25, 35 and 45 years of service.



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CHINOOK VETERAN: Air Cdre Pete Warmerdam served in Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia and Northern Ireland

Oz post for Pete

Staff Reporter

A FORMER special forces Chinook pilot has been appointed as the UK's defence advisor in Australia.

Air Cdre Pete Warmerdam has more than 3,000 flying hours and has supported operations in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Iraq, Libya, East Africa and Afghanistan.

He was awarded a Joint Commander's Commendation during the Second Gulf War.

As a Flight Commander, he served on 27 Sqn completing multiple tours in Helmand Province and later commanded 7 Sqn, which provides Chinook support to Britain's special forces.

Acropolis Now

Reds' Athens flypast ahead of US Independence celebrations



“This tour is a fantastic chance to show the best of British as America marks its 250th anniversary,,

WG CDR SASHA NASH

Staff Reporter Athens

THE RED Arrows staged a dramatic flypast over the Acropolis as they prepare to head Stateside to celebrate the 250th anniversary of American Independence.

The aerobatic aces are completing preparations for this year's display season in the ideal flying conditions in Greece before jetting to the US for a month of performances leading up to Independence Day on July 4.

The team will be joined by Royal Navy ships docked in New York and New Orleans as a month of celebrations kick off this summer, performing at 13 events across seven states to highlight close Anglo-American military ties.

The highlight of the tour will be taking part in an international flypast over New York which will be televised to a worldwide audience of millions.

Officer Commanding the Red Arrows Wg Cdr Sasha Nash said: “The whole Red Arrows team

are greatly looking forward to visiting the United States.

“This tour is a fantastic opportunity to display the best of British at significant events and occasions marking the 250th anniversary, alongside friends, allies and international counterparts.”

The UK and the US continue to share one of the closest defence relationships, underpinned by intelligence cooperation, integrated military planning, joint exercises, advanced defence technology collaboration and

shared strategic objectives.

Defence Minister Lord Vernon Coaker added: “I offer our sincere congratulations to the United States as it celebrates 250 years of independence.

“The defence relationship between our nations is built on unparalleled trust, professionalism and shared purpose.

“British and American forces have served together with distinction for generations, and our alliance remains vital to the security of our countries and our allies around the world.”



Book it

EXPLOITS of a wartime Mosquito pilot shot down over Nazi Germany are retold in a newly-released book

Bomber Command flyer Frank Dell recalls his escape from the disintegrating aircraft and parachuting into a field next to a V2 rocket launch pad in the memoir *Mosquito Down!* published by Fighting High.

Badge of honour

THE TEDDER Academy of Leadership has been formally presented with its Heraldic Badge by Air Officer Commanding 22 Group, AVM Ian Sharrocks.

The presentation of the badge, which incorporates a lion sejant and flaming sword, acknowledges the Academy's growing role in the development of leadership excellence in the RAF, a spokesman said.



Brize prize winner

A BRIZE chaplain has won a distinguished alumni award after becoming the first imam to commission in the RAF.

Sqn Ldr Imam Ali Omar was honoured during the 62nd ceremony at the Islamic University Madinah in Saudi Arabia, which saw more

than 3,320 students graduate from 180 countries.

He said: “It is my sincere hope that this award and recognition show the viability of a Muslim to join and work in our Armed Forces; an honour that I carry and feel proud to serve my country and faith.”





'A terrific storyteller'
BOOKLIST

'A pulse-pounding adventure'
PUBLISHERS WEEKLY



Action-packed fiction informed by Chris Hadfield's real-life experience as an astronaut, pilot and Commander of the International Space Station

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ESPORTS FOR THE ARMED FORCES



Images: BFBS/British Esports/Jonas Konta.utas

10,000km mission to fight killer bug



MEDICAL EMERGENCY: Forces medics parachute into remote Tristan da Cunha along with 2.5 tonnes of vital medical supplies. *Inset below, Voyager refuelling crew's view of Atlas during 10,000km mission*

Simon Mander

TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT launched a 10,000km life-saving medical mission to Britain's most remote overseas territory after a resident was suspected of contracting the deadly hantavirus.

The mission to Tristan da Cunha in the South Atlantic came as UK passengers and crew were quarantined following an outbreak of the virus on the cruise ship MV Hondius.

Armed Forces Minister Al Carns said: "This was an extraordinary operation in incredibly challenging circumstances to get vital help to our citizens on Tristan da Cunha.

"This is a real cross-government effort showing our determination to support our overseas territories and British nationals

affected by the hantavirus outbreak."

Paratroopers, two in tandem with a doctor and a nurse, jumped off the ramp of an A400M on to the island while vital oxygen supplies were air dropped.

It is the first time the UK military has inserted medics to provide humanitarian support via a parachute jump since 1956, when RAF doctor John Wilkinson parachuted in to save a critically-ill civilian on Christmas Island in the South Pacific.

The volcanic South Atlantic island of Tristan da Cunha has no airstrip, is normally only accessible by boat and has 221 inhabitants. With oxygen supplies on the island at a critical level, an airdrop was the only method of getting vital care to the patient in time, the MOD said.

After the UK Health Security



Agency confirmed the suspected case, the military team flew 6,788km from RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire to Ascension Island. The aircraft then proceeded to fly more than 3,000km

to Tristan da Cunha to drop personnel, with the Atlas supported by a Voyager refuelling aircraft.

Weather conditions can be exceptionally challenging, with average wind speeds often exceeding 25mph, presenting difficult conditions for the paratroopers.

16 Air Assault Brigade CO Brig Ed Cartwright said: "This joint effort with the RAF highlights the speed, reach and utility of parachuting."

British nationals from the MV Hondius were repatriated to the UK via a special chartered flight. None of them were reporting symptoms but are being closely monitored.

The MOD has worked with UKHSA to provide vital diagnostic supplies which were delivered to Ascension Island via a military plane.



Runnymede remembers

Staff Reporter

CHIEF OF the Air Staff ACM Sir Harv Smyth (left) led tributes to wartime aircrew killed with no known grave, at the Runnymede Memorial in Surrey.

A flypast by a Battle of Britain Memorial Flight Spitfire served as a powerful reminder of the aircraft flown by the 20,263 Commonwealth personnel honoured at Runnymede.

The RAF Regiment King's Colour Sqn carried ceremonial duties honours, accompanied by RAF Music Services.

Cake that..

BRIZE BOSSES put their baking skills to the test after turning a disused storeroom into a new family kitchen area at the Millennium Amenities Centre, with help from an RAF Benevolent Fund grant.

They're hoping the Bake-Off style launch will prove a hit with Forces parents and youngsters who need to take some time out for cake and a cuppa.

Station Commander Gp Capt Louise Henton said: "I was blown away at the transformation of this space. It's modern, light, colourful and is going to be of huge benefit."





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STEPPING UP: Veteran Ed Sampson gets ready for his challenge at the Star and Garter centre with the help of physiotherapist Belle Fisher

Ed lays it on the line

AIR FORCE veteran Ed Sampson, who was left paralysed by a stroke, hopes to cross the finish line in a 10K run next month on his own two feet to thank the charity that helped with his recovery.

He will be taking part in the fundraiser with his wife Vikki, who will push her husband throughout the course, but Ed plans to get out of his wheelchair just before the finish line.

The 57-year-old former 75th Signals Unit technician said: "Sometimes I feel sorrier for my

wife, who has to push me for 9.9K, but I'm determined to walk the last 100m of the Worthing 10K."

Mr Sampson still trains at Care for Veterans – the local Royal Star & Garter Home where he received intensive treatment.

Lead Physiotherapist Belle Fisher said: "Ed's been working really hard to get to this point, and we are all so inspired by him."

"He's walking further with each session with us and his speed has increased significantly."

● Sponsor Ed at: [justgiving.com/page/vikki-sampson-4](https://www.justgiving.com/page/vikki-sampson-4)



SUPPORT: Vikki

Chinook heat wave fire alert



Simon Mander

ROYAL AIR Force Chinooks are on standby for fire-fighting duties at Akrotiri as Cyprus authorities prepare for a summer heatwave which could see temperatures top 45°C across the eastern Mediterranean.

Crews with 1310 Flt equipped with specialist 'Bambi' buckets capable of hauling more than 2,000 gallons of sea water have been honing their skills ahead of the expected outbreak of wildfires posing a threat to towns and villages.

Last year record temperatures nearing 50°C caused fires across the region, devastating a 100 square kilometre area and claiming two lives.

UK crews are on standby to support local firefighters and forestry teams under the direction of Cypriot emergency services.

The three-strong detachment was stood up at Akrotiri to fulfil the sovereign base area treaty requirements to maintain an aerial firefighting capability.

ISLAND INFERNO: Crewman surveys devastation as fires rip across woodland during record temperatures last year

Slovenia honour for Spit hero

A SPITFIRE pilot killed in the last days of WWII has been remembered in a Slovenian village near where he crashed.

Sgt Edmund Ramsbottom (21), of 249 Sqn was supporting Yugoslav partisans by strafing retreating German columns when an exploding ammunition truck brought down his aircraft.

Nearby villagers in Suhorje retrieved his body and gave him a proper burial, although his remains were later removed to Belgrade war cemetery.

His memory has been kept alive with an annual service at a memorial erected in his honour, which this year was attended by a representative from his old airbase – now MOD Boscombe Down.

Wreaths were laid at the stone



sculpture of a Spitfire tail at the crash site by Slovenian Defence Minister Borut Sajovic and British Chargé d'Affaires Nigel Baker. Representatives of the Pivka

Park of Military History, where historians have worked with the International Bomber Command Centre to research shot down WWII aircrew, also attended.



Brize terminal revamp

PASSENGERS USING Brize to deploy worldwide should find departures easier thanks to improvements at the station.

Military and MOD personnel travelling through the air terminal are set to benefit from improved baggage handling and updated screening and scanning equipment. Development Programme

Manager Matt Lane said: "Delivering upgraded handling systems and advanced screening technology will transform how we process passengers and baggage."

It's hoped the changes will strengthen the station's ability to deploy and sustain operations while maintaining appropriate safety and security standards.

News



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Drone killer

Typhoon packing low-cost weapon



COUNTERING DRONE TERROR: New laser-guided APKWS (pictured below) will be deployed to combat Kamikaze drone threat in broader Middle East

Simon Mander

TYPHOONS FLYING in the Middle East have been fitted with a new low-cost anti-drone weapon.

The Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System (APKWS) can destroy targets precisely and at a fraction of the price of air-to-air missiles currently used.

Pilots from 41 Test and Evaluation Sqn have conducted air-to-air firing demonstrating the equipment's ability to defend against drone attacks and it is now being used on sorties flown by 9 Sqn.

11 Group Operations Deputy Director, Air Cdre Donal McGurk, said: "They are a valuable addition to the air defence package we are already employing with agility across the Middle East."

British weapons including Sky Sabre are deployed in Saudi Arabia, while the Lightweight Multirole Missile is in Bahrain, and the Rapid Sentry and ORCUS systems are protecting Kuwait.

Defence Readiness Minister Luke Pollard said: "This system will help the RAF shoot down many more drones at a much lower cost."

It uses a laser targeting system which turns unguided missiles into low-cost precision weapons able to take down enemy drones.

In less than two months it has gone from the drawing board to the air after work by the MOD, BAE Systems and QinetiQ.

BAE Air Systems managing director



Simon Barnes said: "This capability demonstrates Typhoon's exceptional versatility and underlines its continued role as the backbone of combat air across Europe and the Middle East."

UK aircraft operate across the region and have now passed 2,500 flying hours since the Iran conflict began, equivalent to more than three months of continuous flying.

The news comes after the MOD signed a multi-million-pound contract to buy Skyhammer interceptor missiles to counter Shahed-style attack drones.

The department has committed over £650 million to upgrade the RAF's Typhoon fighter jet fleet that will continue protecting British skies until at least the 2040s.

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WWII duo hit 205 yrs

Simon Mander

TWO WARTIME veterans celebrated landmark birthdays at their care home.

Former WAAF wireless operator Joyce Greathead marked her 105th and the following day Barbara Bale turned 100.

Londoner Joyce served for three years until 1946 at airbases including RAF Westcott and Hinton-in-the-Hedges.

She said: "I was sometimes stationed in the Tower Control where the operator kept in touch with the pilots while they were training – learning how to map-read and fly across the country."

Joyce demobbed in 1946 and worked in a bank where she met John, and the couple married in 1952.

Barbara was visited by RAF and Army Nurses and Healthcare Assistants from the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine at Queen Elizabeth Hospital and Solihull Mayor Annette Mackenzie.

Born in Yardley, Birmingham, she was 13 when war broke out and remembers the windows of her home being shattered during a German air raid while the family sought safety in an Anderson shelter in the garden.

During World War II, Barbara met Fleet Air Arm pilot Bill and the couple married in 1950.

Armed Forces medical personnel are regular visitors to the Solihull Home, joining in activities and chatting to veterans.

Royal Star & Garter spokesman Goolistan Cooper said: "Founded in 1916, we provide care, support and friendship for veterans and their families so that they can live well. The charity delivers nursing and dementia care through homes in Solihull, Surbiton, High Wycombe and now in Worthing, having recently merged with Care for Veterans. It also offers a range of community-based services for residents."



BARBARA: 100



JOYCE: 105



Bomber boffin tribute lands



A PIONEERING engineer whose invention transformed WWII aircraft is to be honoured at the International Bomber Command Centre.

Sir George Dowty, whose hydraulic landing gear played a key role in the Lancaster bomber's success, has been immortalised in an 8ft bronze sculpture.

IBCC Trustees Chairman

ACM Sir Mike Graydon said: "George Dowty was a brilliant engineer and an unsung hero in the Lancaster Bomber tale."

"It is fitting that we find a home for one whose faultlessly designed and manufactured undercarriages were instrumental to safe landings for our crews at the completion of their flights."

Red Sea Dragon mission reunites wartime legends

Staff Reporter

TWO OF the RAF's legendary wartime squadrons took to the skies together again to support Red Sea operations.

The 617 Sqn Dambusters joined the IX (Bomber) Sqn as they scrambled from Akrotiri to deliver defensive cover for HMS Dragon, deployed to the region to boost security.

Operating in mixed formations, Typhoon and F-35B crews flew six waves of fighter missions, maintaining continuous coverage.

In a mission reminiscent of the units' joint attack on the Nazi warship Tirpitz in 1944, the Lossiemouth-based Typhoons and F-35B Lightnings from Marham joined forces over the Red Sea during a Defensive Counter Air operation to safeguard the Navy vessel.

Supported by Voyager tankers they provided more than 50 hours of continuous cover up to 1,300 miles from their Cypriot base, Akrotiri.

Air Cdre Fred Wigglesworth said: "This activity demonstrated



SECURITY: HMS Dragon deploys to the Red Sea supported by Typhoons and F-35s. Inset right, taking on fuel during 50-hour mission

the RAF's ability to integrate and sustain combat air power at range alongside our Royal Navy partners.

"Operating Typhoon and F-35B aircraft together, enabled by Voyager air-to-air refuelling,

showcased the agility, reach and interoperability that underpin UK air power.

"This is agile air power, always ready, projected and sustained at range."

Gulf War POW connects with 99-year-old bombing survivor



FAMILY AFFAIR: Nichol's mum Catherine aged about 18, left, with her mother and sister outside their home in Coronation Street, North Shields, just after the war



SPECIAL CONNECTION: Author Nichol with 99-year-old Blitz survivor Millie Matthews

The Blitz the trauma

MANY CONSIDER The Blitz to be the months between September 1940 and May 1941, mainly affecting London. But the truth is that the attack from the German Blitzkrieg, or lightning war, was much more widespread and devastating.

This month marks the 85th anniversary of the 'supposed' end of The Blitz, and in his new book *Blitz, When World War Two Came Home* (simonandschuster.co.uk) – his 20th – former RAF navigator John Nichol has a fresh perspective on this supposedly familiar story.

It's a subject that's particularly personal for Nichol – his idea for the book started with a search to understand his mother's experiences of The Blitz on Tyneside. And in talking to 99-year-old Blitz survivor Millie Matthews, who lived near Nichol's mother Catherine in North Shields, he discovered a connection between her terrifying experience and his of surviving bombing raids when he was a prisoner of war during the first Gulf War in 1991.

Nichol said: "It is a very personal book and it has been such a delight finding Millie, who was the same age as my Mum – they lived not far from each other. That was amazing, to hear what it was really like during The Blitz."

Although Nichol's mother never talked about the war, she did refer in passing to a 'terrible incident' that took place near her home and where whole families were killed. This was the bombing of the Wilkinson's lemonade factory, on May 3, 1941, which housed a designated air-raid shelter in the basement.

Refuge

Nichol explained: "The bomb had pierced the roof, exploding and shattering the building's upper structure. In a split second, tons of bricks, beams, steel machinery and vats of chemicals used in the manufacture of drinks cascaded down through the factory's insubstantial wooden floors, and onto those sleeping in the refuge below. Many died instantly, mangled and broken."

Millie, who was 14, remembered: "There was no warning, no explosion, flash or noise...The lights had gone out. It was just dead silent and very black. It was very, very quiet and then everybody realised what was happening. A few seconds later people began crying, yelling, screaming."

Millie managed to push three or four children out of a hole towards safety, then helped her younger brother Stanley, who was injured. But they lost contact with their seven-year-old sister Mona. It was a week before Mona was found – she had been taken in by a woman who ran a local haberdashery shop and was dressed in beautiful clothes.

Millie said: "We never found out how she got out, only that the lady found her



wandering around the street and took her in. It really was a miracle."

A total of 107 people were killed in the Wilkinson's disaster, making it one of the worst civilian incidents of the war. Only about 50 survived.

Millie still lives in North Shields and her brother Stanley, now in his mid-90s, lives in Canada. They speak to each other on the phone every Sunday.

It took years to get over her experience. Millie told Nichol: "I wasn't physically hurt, but mentally I was in a bad way. I had a lot of nightmares

by Tracey Allen

Survivor whose life echoed that of his beloved mother John, Mum & Stanley The story of war

“In a split second tons of bricks, steel and vats of chemicals crashed onto those sleeping below”



DEVASTATION: 107 people died when the Wilkinson's lemonade factory in North Shields, with a bomb shelter in its basement, was hit by a German bomb



PROUD DAY: Author John Nichol atop a Tornado with his mother Catherine after the First Gulf War, in 1991

Win copy of book

WE HAVE copies of John Nichol's superb new book to win. For your chance to own one, tell us:

Where does the term 'blitz' come from?

Email your answer, marked Blitz book competition, to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or post it to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe HP14 4UE, to arrive by June 12.

Win!



He said: “There is a sense of joy in being able to discuss this darkest of memories with someone – the same age as my mum, from the very same town – who knows what it is like. And a sense of sadness that I never discussed such pivotal experiences with my mother.”

He added: “People didn't talk about what they went through during the war and Millie explained why not. She said you just got on with it – what would be the point of talking about it? Everyone had their lives to live, everyone had suffered.”

Sexual abuse

The book also looks into stories of evacuated children who suffered physical and sexual abuse, serial killer ‘the Blackout Ripper’ who stalked the streets of London, 750,000 pet cats and dogs put down in one week in anticipation of expected air raids, and a marked increase in sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy outside

marriage.

In this extensively researched title, using interviews with survivors, official records and eyewitness testimonies, Nichol gives voice to the unsung heroes of The Blitz. And to shine light on the stories, he speaks to their modern counterparts, including Explosive Ordnance Disposal experts and the firefighters who tackled the deadly Grenfell Tower blaze.

Nichol said: “I have spent much of my life since leaving the RAF trying to digest the complex realities of war. With the drone attacks on Gaza and on Lebanon people are going through what Millie did 85 years ago, people are still suffering.

“I regret not talking to my parents about what I went through during the first Gulf War and they never spoke to me about what they went through in the 1940s. It's been wonderful to revisit that with Millie and Stanley.”



PHONE CALLS: Millie's brother Stanley, who now lives in Canada

and would wake up shaking and screaming. I simply couldn't get it all off my mind...If the weather was stormy, I would hide under the bed or in the cupboards at the crashes of thunder.”

PTSD

Today Millie's symptoms would be recognised as PTSD – something Nichol identifies with strongly. On active duty during

Gulf War I, his Tornado bomber was shot down during a mission over Iraq. Captured, tortured and held as a POW, Nichol and his pilot John Peters were paraded on television, leaving one of the most enduring images of the conflict.

The author explained: “Hearing her [Millie's] story is opening a door to my own experiences of conflict. Much of what she and Stanley went through is hauntingly familiar to me.

“After being shot down and held captive in Baghdad, my fellow POWs and I endured endless Allied bombing raids targeting the Iraqi capital and its regime. Despite my training as a Tornado navigator, I had been completely unprepared for the intensity of life at the wrong end of an air raid.”

Nichol survived the bombing of the prison and, decades later, shared his near-death experience of being bombed with Millie.

Advertorial.

“One foot in front of the other”: Elaine’s story of love, service and relentless strength

Elaine Paxton has always believed in teams.

Long before life tested her in ways she could never have imagined, she and her husband Adrian were already a winning side. Married for 32 years, together for 36, with two grown children, James and Katie, they built a life rooted in laughter, shared values and an instinctive understanding of one another. They called it Team Paxton.

Elaine served for five years in the Royal Navy as a telephonist, working in communications on busy air stations across England and Scotland. The military, she says, gave her confidence and resilience. “It taught me what I was capable of,” she reflects – lessons that would later prove vital.

Adrian served in the RAF. They met on an air station in Fife in December 1990. “He came past on a motorbike in green-and-white leathers,” Elaine smiles. “It was love at first sight.”

For years, life was good. They raised their children, worked hard, renovated their home together and laughed constantly. Then, in January 2022, everything changed.

At one in the morning, Adrian fell out of bed – completely out of character. “I knew instantly something wasn’t right,” Elaine recalls. Moments later, he couldn’t speak. When he stopped breathing, Elaine resuscitated him. Paramedics rushed him to hospital, but COVID restrictions meant she couldn’t go with him.

The next day came the call she will never forget: Adrian wasn’t expected to survive. Elaine was told to say goodbye. Standing by his bed, she turned – as she always had – to humour. “I told him I’d just bought him a £500 lifetime

membership to a distillery, and he’d only had it 17 days,” she says. “That wasn’t acceptable.”

Adrian survived. But the stroke left him severely disabled, initially unable to walk or speak. He spent 18 months in hospital. Elaine finished their house alone, grieving the life they once knew – yet certain that Adrian was still Adrian.

“When the hospital talked about a care home, I didn’t even contemplate it,” she says. “I told them, ‘Just watch me. He’s coming home.’”

Elaine challenged decisions, called meetings and refused to back down. “I was fighting for our life,” she says. From the outside, she appeared to cope. Inside, the weight was immense. “One night I went into the garden and screamed into the darkness. I had nothing left.”

Everything began to change when Elaine attended a local veterans’ breakfast club and met Jane, a Veterans Clinical Advisor for Help for Heroes.

“Jane asked, ‘What’s your story?’ and I told her everything,” Elaine says. “She told me, ‘You’re not alone. We can help.’”

Help for Heroes supported the whole family – arranging occupational therapy, counselling, respite and practical help. After being let down elsewhere, Elaine was sceptical. But the support kept coming. “It was the start of not feeling alone,” she says.

The impact was felt across Team Paxton. Adrian’s confidence began to return. His speech and mobility improved. Katie noticed the shift too. “Knowing Mum finally had people who understood made such a difference,” she says.



Jane, who served as an RAF nurse for 44 years, adds: “It’s not just about the veteran, it’s about the whole family. Elaine was exhausted and heartbroken when we met. Seeing hope return has been incredible.”

Life looks different now, but it is still full. They plan days out, holidays and small goals. Adrian is working towards baking and gardening again. Elaine is looking forward to getting back on her bike. There is laughter every day – and gratitude in the smallest moments.

Strength, she’s learned, isn’t loud. “It’s strength of mind. Strength of character. Showing up, every day.”

Her message is simple: “Find your people. You don’t have to do it by yourself.”

“One foot in front of the other. One step at a time. It’s Team Paxton – and it’s going to take more than this to bring us down.”

If you served and you think Help for Heroes can support you, please get in touch today.

CAS leads Commonwealth tribute



CAS: Lays wreath at memorial

HIGH NOTE: RAF musician

Tracey Allen

CHIEF OF the Air Staff ACM Sir Harv Smyth led the proceedings at the RAF's annual memorial service at the Runnymede Air Forces Memorial earlier this month.

CAS laid a wreath and delivered an address commemorating the 20,263 members of the Commonwealth Air Forces who lost their lives in World War II and who have no known grave.

Other high-ranking Air officers in attendance included AM Sir Stuart Atha, the RAF member of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and AM Sir David Walker, who represented the Royal Auxiliary Air Force.

AVM Giles Legood, the RAF Chaplain-in-Chief, conducted the service at the Memorial in Englefield Green near Egham, Surrey.

Lady Smyth and WORAF Murugesvaran Subramanian (*inset right*) also attended and RAF Northolt Commander Gp Capt Lee Wales represented the station's personnel, reflecting the close ties between the base and the memorial which was unveiled by Queen Elizabeth II in 1953 and stands as a testament



to the bravery and sacrifice of aircrew from across the Commonwealth.

Each year, the RAF reaffirms the commitment to remember those who gave their lives in the pursuit of peace and freedom.

The Mayor of Runnymede, Cllr Margaret Harnden, laid a wreath for the final time as mayor of the area. More than 30 Commonwealth High Commissioners and government dignitaries were also present.

A parade of Standards and representatives from the RAF and other associations connected to the memorial also laid wreaths and paid their respects to the fallen aviators commemorated on the walls of the memorial.

A large RAF contingent from Benson, Brize Norton, Halton, High Wycombe, Odiham and Northolt were in attendance with representatives from the RAF Ethnic Minority Network and Cadets who assisted with distributing the Order of Service for the day.

The Route Lining Party and wreath bearers were provided by The King's Colour Squadron and an ensemble of The Central Band of



FLYPAST: All eyes look up at the BBMF Spitfire overhead

the Royal Air Force provided musical support.

A highlight of the service was a flypast by the iconic Spitfire from the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, serving as a powerful reminder of the aircraft flown by many of those honoured at Runnymede.

After the memorial ceremony members of the public were given the

opportunity to lay wreaths and pay their respects.

Flt Lt Colin Ihe from RAF Northolt was Project Lead for the event. He said: "The ceremony marked one of the final events for Mrs Michele Small from RAF Ceremonial, who is retiring. She will be fondly missed and is highly regarded by all connected to this event, who wish her the best on her retirement."



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Wg Cdr Peter Brooker **Feature**

Pilot with DFC & bar who disappeared without trace

PETER BROOKER had a remarkable wartime career which encompassed key roles in the Battle of Britain, the Blitz, the fall of Singapore, D-Day and the drive into Germany.

But in April 1945, just 22 days before VE Day, his Hawker Tempest V failed to return from a flight to Germany. The aircraft and his remains have never been accounted for.

Wg Cdr Brooker was an inspiring man and a born leader. In *A Fighter Pilot's War* (Air World, pen-and-sword.co.uk) his nephew Malcolm Sutherland does his uncle's life justice. He describes an incredible eight-year RAF career and a tragic death, barely three weeks before the end of the European war.

Brooker led from the front. One superior described him as an 'instinctive leader'. He had endured childhood tragedy. His father's suicide when he was 10 instilled the belief that he must become the 'man of the house' for his mother and two sisters. By his mid-teens, he was leaning towards the RAF. Letters to his older sister show his clear sense of direction. He joined the Service in April 1937, aged 18.

When the war broke out, Brooker was an experienced Hurricane pilot with 56 Squadron. Pre-war and during the 'Phoney War', he saw colleagues lost in training accidents and in misidentification 'friendly fire' incidents. The mood during this tense time was conveyed in Brooker's diary, with a high state of readiness but little action with enemy aircraft.

Brooker was highly regarded. In May and June 1940, he was AVM Keith Park's secretary. However, he was soon pitched back into frontline duties. In July and August Brooker was at the sharp end of the Battle of Britain, downing German aircraft and surviving three crash landings.

The squadron's removal from the frontline to Boscombe Down and No. 10 Group in September only meant a slight reduction in tempo, with continued scrambles, interceptions and training.

Brooker's leadership prowess was rewarded in April 1941. At 22, he was appointed commander of 1 Sqn, often escorting bombers over occupied France.

Even bigger challenges followed when he was posted



FIGHTER ACE: Brooker, left, flew Hurricanes with 56 Sqn, above, at the outbreak of WWII and Hawker Tempests, below, as Wg Cdr Flying 122 Wg. Below, left, just after receiving his wings in 1938

Win copy of book

YOU COULD win a copy of Malcolm Sutherland's book. For your chance to own one, tell us:

How old was Peter Brooker when he joined the RAF?

Email your answer, marked A Fighter Pilot's War book competition, to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or post it to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE to arrive by June 12.



Win!

to Far East Command in November 1941. Initially, he was earmarked to be Aide-de-Camp to ACM Robert Bruce-Popham, Commander-in-Chief Far East in Singapore. After the tempo of operations at home, Brooker was shocked at the world he now encountered. He

highlighted the luxury and the complacency and underestimation of the Japanese, usually on racial lines.

Brooker attempted to rally 232 Sqn against overwhelming odds, his inspirational leadership only delaying the inevitable. The chaotic situation is reflected in contemporary records, often hand-written accounts produced later in India from memory. Post-war reports and subsequent published sources help fill gaps in the squadron's moves through Singapore, Sumatra and Java. His gallantry during these harrowing weeks was recognised with the award of the Bar to his DFC.

After commanding fighter squadrons in Australia and helping establish new squadrons in New Zealand, Brooker was later plunged back into the European conflict in the preparatory phase before D-Day.



As Wg Cdr Flying with 123 Wing, flying the often-challenging Hawker Typhoon, this involved leading reconnaissance operations and attacking German radar stations and military convoys. Intense activity followed in Normandy as Allied forces edged forward.

Following a period at Staff College, Brooker returned to flying in January 1945. He assumed command of 122 Wing of Hawker Tempests in southern Holland as Wg Cdr Flying.

Family accounts testify that the strains of command were taking their toll on Peter Brooker. As the RAF moved into Germany, on April 16, he made his final flight from the former Luftwaffe base of Rheine Hopsten.

The wreckage of Brooker's

aircraft has never been found. Sutherland doubts the hitherto accepted story that after being hit by a Focke-Wulf, the Tempest crashed in flames by an autobahn. While this account is questioned, without a crash site he can only speculate about how his uncle died or where his remains lie.

The author exploits a rich array of sources. Letters, diaries, family recollections, logbooks and RAF Operations Record Books produce a personal and professional portrait.

Peter Brooker was sensible and mature beyond his years, one of a unique group to have won both the DSO & Bar and DFC & Bar. This biography explains the talent and leadership skills which made him an outstanding airman.

Review by Alastair Noble

Royal Air Force In Concert



Registered Charity No. 1101767

7.30pm Saturday 18 April

Lecture Theatre, Newark Academy

7.30pm Saturday 16 May

The Music of John Williams 'In Concert' (Compere Melvyn Prior)

Lincoln Cathedral

7.30pm Friday 29 May

Playhouse Theatre, Weston super Mare

7.30pm Saturday 26 September

Palace Theatre, Newark

7.30pm Sunday 27 September

Cast, Doncaster

7.30pm Friday 2 October

Epsom Playhouse

7.30pm Friday 16 October

Terry O'Toole Theatre, Lincoln

2026

www.rafconcerts.uk

by Tracey Allen

Windsor wonders



CHAMPION: Victor Bettendorf and Qwando van de Rispen

TOP-CLASS international show jumping, carriage driving, dressage, demonstrations from polo ponies and spectacular performances from the Azerbaijan Equestrian Foundation were among the highlights of this year's Royal Windsor Horse Show.

The annual event, which took place earlier this month, raised funds for charity Warrior Equine – which supports Armed Forces veterans, serving personnel, first responders and members of the police force who have experienced severe psychological trauma.

It is the only time of year the private grounds of Windsor Castle are open to the public. The event featured international equestrian competition in show jumping, driving and endurance, reaching its pinnacle on the final day with the Rolex Grand Prix. It also hosted four arenas of prestigious showing classes, plus international equestrian and military displays.

The show's pinnacle class, the CSI5* Rolex Grand Prix, brought three days of world-class show jumping to a thrilling

close. A field of 34 leading horse and rider combinations, including six of the world's current top 10 ranked riders, contested the up-to-height 1.60m course, designed by Portugal's Bernardo Costa Cabral.

Five combinations progressed to the jump-off against the clock, vying for a share of the €500,000 prize fund. First to return for the jump-off, Luxembourg's Victor Bettendorf, set the standard, producing a clear round in 37.41 seconds. Britain's Ben Maher and Sienna Charles both delivered faultless performances to finish second and third respectively, but neither could catch the Luxembourg's leading time.

Speaking after the class, Bettendorf said: "I've been dreaming about this green [Rolex] blanket for a while, so I'm really proud and happy to win one.

I'm really grateful.

"I love to compete in Great Britain. It's always a wonderful atmosphere with horse people all around, and you feel really welcome."

The final day also featured the concluding phases of the CAIO4*-H4 FEI Driving World Cup™ Qualifier, and a host of top-level national showing championships, bringing together many of the finest horse and rider combinations from around the globe, said a RWHS spokesperson.

Belgium's Dries Degriek claimed victory in the CAIO4*-H4 FEI Driving World Cup™ Qualifier and the Rolex Grand Prix made it a double on the day for Bettendorf, who won the CSI5* Manama Rose Show Stakes earlier in the morning, aboard Atchoum

de la Roque Z.

Great Britain's Jack Whitaker had held the lead of the 1.50m speed competition for the majority of the class, holding off challenges from some of the best riders in the world, however as the penultimate to go, Bettendorf knocked over a second off Whitaker's time to take the title.

Bettendorf said: "Jack had a very good round, but I had an advantage as I had managed to watch his round before I got on, so I knew what I had to do."

Land of Fire: Azerbaijan – a high-energy performance bringing together dancers, riders, horses and the Azerbaijan Equestrian Foundation's marching band – was a crowd favourite.

The Royal Windsor Horse Show was founded in 1943 to support the war effort.

● For more details about the Forces charity benefiting this year, go to: warriorequine.co.uk.

MY LITTLE PONY: Miss Penny Richardson on Briar Snowman, inset left
ALL PHOTOS: ©RWHS, Peter Nixon, Fiona Crawford



LADIES HUNTER: Charlotte Clark on Harbour Master II



POPULAR: Azerbaijan riders



DRIVING SEAT: Dries Degriek



SHOW PONY CHAMPS: Izzy Walker and Stoneleigh Showtime



ANY GEN Z will tell you that the Capri is a mid-size electric SUV, a sporty looking version of Ford's Explorer. They will look at you blankly if you tell them that the Capri was once a really cool coupé and will not care that the name has been stolen.

The problem is that some of us do remember the Capri, we do remember that it was the closest thing to a Mustang you could buy in Britain, that it was a legend on the tintop racing scene and we remember it starring in TV shows like *The Professionals*.

Exterior

Look at the new Capri and you note that it's a hefty SUV. It wouldn't fare well on the track, or catch many bad guys in a TV car chase. It's just not the same brief. Nevertheless, it has inherited some Capri charisma.

The window outline, the flick of the boot hatch and the lights all give a nod to the original two-door coupé. It's not a sporty car, in the traditional sense, but it's a pretty attractive, distinctive motor car. The alloy wheels instantly grab the eye.

Interior

Ford has spent a lot of time getting the cabin right. It's a mix of cutting-edge technology, retro flair and hints of race design. The dashboard is shared with the Explorer. It's a clean design, dominated by the huge centre touchscreen infotainment system.

There's plenty of space inside and it doesn't feel cramped like a coupé. The slightly sloping rear window might prove a barrier to loading stupidly bulky furniture but, beyond that, there's very little sacrifice in terms of utility.

One downside is that there's a lot of black and grey plastic on display, but the sporty integrated front seat head restraints, fabric-clad soundbar and the B&O sound system make up for it.

Everything is well laid out and it's easy to find an engaging driving position, thanks to well-aligned pedals and lots of seat/wheel adjustment. The squared-off steering wheel is a nice touch, with a simple instrument screen behind, that makes everything easy to see at a glance.

Elsewhere, there's a lot of VW tech dotted about, including the oddly-designed window and light switches. Now they are an acquired taste! The pivoting 14.6 inch centre screen is a nice touch though and



ORIGINAL: A 'proper' Ford Capri

That's no Capri, Gen Z

it has a cool party trick. It acts as a lid for a little cupboard that's hidden behind it. The screen locks with the central locking too, for security, so your secret CI5 documents can remain safe, even when the windows are left open.

Storage compartments are in ample supply and the interior is, overall, a comfortable, modern environment, with a few nice retro touches. I'd have preferred a few more physical switches, but I'm a picky dinosaur... So I'm told, by a Gen Z.

On the road

Getting behind the wheel of the Capri was something I had been looking forward to, because I really didn't know what to expect. The original Capri was an unpredictable beast that gave you a greatly varied driving experience, depending on the model and the road conditions. Yet here, we have a modern, electric SUV with all the underpinnings of the Explorer. Paradox.

I took the Capri for a blast down winding, hilly open roads, before

Pros

- Distinctive styling
- Dependable pace
- Well-equipped

Cons

- Interior quality is average
- Some rivals handle better
- Doesn't scratch that old Capri itch

Verdict

FOR OLD-SCHOOL motoring journos like me, it's a tough

Ford Capri

call. It's not a 'proper' Capri and Ford could have gone down a far more exciting route. Nevertheless, it is a really good EV SUV that, thanks to its exterior design, stands out in the most overcrowded car sales segment. Forget the name and you've got a new SUV that ticks all the right boxes.

heading into the council estates of Birmingham. It was a proper work-out. Our test car was the heavier AWD Premium model and it did surprisingly well. 0-62mph is achieved in 5.3 seconds and it's rapid for mid-range overtakes. The extra weight of the AWD helps it to cushion the bumps and remain composed through undulating bends at speed. Some rivals offer a sharper drive, but it's a good effort from Ford.

There's a huge amount of grip,

but it feels playful and engaging, with plenty of grunt under your right foot. The AWD adds an extra motor to power the front wheels, but this only adds 54bhp to the total output, which means it still feels rear-driven through the bends. That's a nice touch. Body lean is well contained and wind noise is nothing to worry about.

The only downside is that the light steering never really builds up any weight and doesn't provide a great sense of connection with

the front wheels, so it's not what you'd call 'fun' to drive, but it offers dependable, spirited pace that, unlike fast Capris of old, isn't constantly trying to kill you.

That's primarily because, underneath, the Capri is very similar to the Explorer. The suspension has just been dropped by 20mm to give it a sportier feel.

Around the council estates of Bartley Green, its smart presence isn't overstated, to the point of grabbing undue attention. It's a silent 2.2-tonne crossover that prowls the mean city streets effortlessly. Visibility isn't best in class for tight parking spaces, but add the safety pack and you're sorted.

In terms of range, official figures suggest the Capri will cover 346 miles on a single charge but, as we know, EVs rarely achieve maximum range guides in the real world. We averaged around 3.2mi/kWh, which gave us over 200 miles. You can expect the Capri to charge from 10-80 per cent in under 30 minutes though, which is a bonus.

GAMES



GAMES: Sporting challenges for Nato cadets: PHOTOS: LINDA LOWING

RAF Nato win

THERE WAS a British cadet sporting victory at RAF Cranwell as the Inter-Collegiate Games went the way of the Service over the Dutch Koninklijke Militaire Academie.

An exciting weekend at the Royal Air Force Officer Training Academy (RAFOTA) saw cadets take part in seven sporting challenges before a Superstars-style event to close.

A spokesperson said: "Across every event, the level of competition and professionalism was outstanding, but these games are about more than results, they're about building trust, strengthening partnerships and reinforcing the bonds between NATO allies who train and operate side by side.

"From teamwork under pressure to leadership in action, shared values were on full display. The camaraderie, sportsmanship and friendships formed over the weekend are exactly what this event is all about."



Next on the sporting calendar for RAFOTA will be a visit to Royal Military Academy Sandhurst to compete against the Army and Royal Navy's officer academies in the upcoming Inter-Collegiate Games.

SCUBA DIVING

Brize divers fly the flag for sub aqua

BRIZE NORTON Sub Aqua made a splash at the RAF Scuba AGM, swimming away with several awards: Best Club, Diver of the Year and Videographer of the Year.

The club award recognised 'the significant growth, professionalism and commitment shown across all areas of adventurous training and diving delivery over the past year, reflecting the hard work and dedication of the club's instructors, committee members and divers, who have continued to expand opportunities and participation across Brize Norton.'

Taking home the prestigious Paul Goodwin RAF Scuba Diver of the Year award, AS1(T) Blair was recognised for his 'exceptional achievement, commitment and contribution to service diving across the RAF Scuba community.'

The club also secured the Videography Award for Mr Phil Blake of Airtanker, recognising 'the



high-quality media and content produced to showcase RAF diving, adventurous training and the experiences delivered through the club and community.'

FITNESS



PODIUM PRIDE: Mixed team winners

BeCos fitness is important

"A FANTASTIC day and a great turn-out," was the takeaway from the first Cosfit Games as 32 personnel in eight teams produced three separate event winners.

The day of fitness – brainchild of Cpl Jess Stewart – saw the gym and swimming pool at RAF Cosford become the staging ground for a day of 'strength', 'hydro', 'engine' and 'lactic' challenges, with teams split into three groups: mixed, male and female.

Team Ego Over Everything – Cpl Chris Craig, Cpl Chis Moulam-Jones, Cpl Demi Trip and Cpl Steph Pye – won the mixed category; while Phylum, PIT Course 110 – Cpl George Fowler, AR Arnold Margrets, AS1 Sam Jarvis and AR Thomas Pety won the male event; and The OAPs – Sgt Zara Cavanagh, Cpl Robyn Wainwright-Tanner, Cpl Jo Belgrau and Cpl Nat Karkoszka – took the female prize.

Stewart said: "The teams worked hard and there were some incredible performances. It was a social and fun day of physical challenges.

"I look forward to running the next Cosfit Games. I hope that it can grow bigger and better every year and we can include all three Services within the next few years."

The day kicked off with a strength event, which involved an Olympic lift session and MAX strict pull-ups, followed by the Hydro event in the station's pool, which combined swimming and exercises in the water.

The day's longest event, titled 'Engine', featured cardiovascular and endurance challenges, including teams working on a variety of kit while keeping a 40/50kg sandbag from touching the floor.

The day closed with the



PUT THE KETTLE ON: Endurance challenge

Lactic section – a short anaerobic event in a relay format around the station's athletics track.

Stewart added: "It was a great day. I had some really positive feedback, people loved the events and we're excited to come back and do it all again."

To see your sport featured in **RAF News**, send a short report (max. 300 words) and a couple of photographs (attached hi-res jpegs) to: **Sports@rafnews.co.uk**

Sport

FOOTBALL



EXTINGUISHED: RAF Fire's hopes of a finals berth were put out by Icarus in a 2-0 victory at Woodhall Spa United in the semis

TG5 and Icarus to battle it out for Astra crown

Daniel Abrahams

AFTER A bumper Astra Trade League, the season will end in a final between TG5 Ground Engineers and Icarus at Wantage Town FC.

The clash will take place after a RAF mixed Select XI plays the FA Football United Diversity Team.

Flt Lt Liam Jones, Icarus centre back, is hoping for revenge on TG5, after the officers' team lost out to them at the semi-final stage last year.

"We have had some battles this year during the season, and I expect another in the final. I would love to right the defeat of last year to TG5, we all feel the history of this team and we want to add this title to the record of title wins," said Jones.

TG5 manager WO Richie Killick said: "To reach another final is a great achievement. Having to forfeit our first fixture due to only having six

players available put pressure on the remaining fixtures and was not ideal, but to be in the final is brilliant."

The RAF Astra Trade League is in its fourth season and now boasts 12 teams in its Churchill and Bader divisions.

Icarus team manager Sqn Ldr Si Wain, whose charges remain unbeaten, said: "We have enjoyed a landmark season, competing across both the Astra League and the Emergency Services Football League, with success on both fronts, driving increased interest and recruitment to the club."

Excellent early results saw Icarus take an early lead in the Churchill division, with Sparks

FC lighting up the Bader division.

After three draws from fixtures, it was clear reigning champions RAF Regiment FC would not make the semi-finals. That spot came down to the last league game of the season between The Ground Engineers and Aries FC to take the runner-up position and get into the semis to join Churchill Division winners Icarus.

A strong four-goal performance from the Ground Engineers proved too much for Aries, with the fixture ending 4-2.

The semis were held at Woodhall Spa United's ground on two days, where Icarus were too strong for RAF Fire, winning 2-0 and The Ground Engineers edging out a battling Sparks team, 2-1.



DIVISION WINNERS: Churchill champs Icarus, left, and Bader bosses Sparks FC, far left

GOLF

A hole lotta drama

IT WAS repeat glory for AS1 Sam Whitaker after he retained the RAF Strokeplay Crown after a dramatic play-off at Silloth on Solway Golf Club, beating debutant AS2 Ollie Read.

The championships delivered three days of high-quality, hard-fought golf, as a field of 37 of the Service's finest players converged on the renowned links course.

Flt Lt Stu Hardy capitalised on the calmer early conditions with an outstanding three under par 69, highlighted by a superb eagle three on the par five 17th.

Defending champion Whitaker kept close contact with an impressive two under par 70.

Further notable performances came from Fg Off Finlay Nichols (73) and FS Rob Wride (74).

Day two saw the leading pair go head to head in the final group, Whitaker carding a 75 and Hardy 77.

The standout round came from debutant Read with a superb three under par 69 but an opening day 83 left him with a significant deficit heading into the final round, seven shots adrift of the lead.

Attention centred on the duel between Whitaker and Hardy on the final day but it was Read who mounted a remarkable charge from behind, posting a brilliant five under par 67 – the lowest round of the championship.

As Hardy's challenge faded over the closing holes, Whitaker



STILL CHAMPION: AS1 Whitaker (left) receives trophy from men's captain Wg Cdr Jamie Nickless

stood on the 18th tee with a two-shot advantage over Read, who had already completed his round. Spectators gathered around the finishing green to witness Whitaker's closing moments, only for drama to unfold as his approach found a bunker.

With limited options, he carded a double bogey to finish with a 74 and force a sudden-death play-off.

Pars for both players on the first two extra holes extended the contest to a third. As the hole unfolded Read misjudged his approach shot, and Whitaker seized the opportunity, striking a composed wedge into the heart of the green.

Unable to save par, Read left Whitaker needing only a short putt for victory, which he made.

● Follow RAF Golf on Instagram @rafgolfofficial.

FOOTBALL

Wolves glory for sarge

"THE RAF has changed my life," said Sgt Dan McNamara, after securing Super League promotion to WSL2 for Wolverhampton Wanderers Women.

McNamara, who has led the team over the last five years, saw his charges chase Burnley throughout the season, ending on 61 points, just one behind the full-time set-up in the Women's National League North.

Promotion came following a 1-0 play-off win against Plymouth Argyle at Burton's Pirelli Stadium, thanks to Charlotte Greengrass's 64th-minute strike, with the team now playing in the women's professional leagues for the first time in the club's history, in the second tier of English Women's Football – the WSL 2.

"It's been a hell of a few weeks, we started brilliantly so to run a full-time Burnley team all the way to the wire was unbelievable," said McNamara, whose team won 20 of its 22 fixtures, losing only once, and were also Birmingham Challenge Cup finalists.

"We worked tirelessly to get to the play-offs. We have come through a lot of adversity.



CUP JOY: Sgt Dan McNamara

"It's crazy to think that five years ago I missed the play-off final as I was posted to the Falklands, but I knew we would make them this time, from day one of the training season."

An RAF Cosford weapons engineer, McNamara was able to pursue his coaching role with Wolves Women full-time after he was accepted on the RAF's Elite Athlete Scheme.

"I always wanted to be in the professional game in some capacity and I'm really proud to represent the RAF on the global stage in one of the top leagues, hopefully I can continue to do the Air Force proud," he said.

● Follow Wolves Women FC on Instagram @wolveswomenfc.

BOXING

Life's gr-eight for Axe as he goes distance

Latest pro fight's a step up for Brad



BLOODY HERO: RAF fighter Cpl Brad Axe, right, lands a perfect jab to the face of Kev Reavell; and the roar of victory, inset below

Daniel Abrahams

“I’VE WORKED so hard for this, and this win puts me on the trajectory to where I want to go,” said Cpl Brad Axe after his latest professional boxing win.

A single point divided the aviator and his opponent Kevin Reavell at York Hall, London after the thunderous bout.

The eight-round fight was uncharted waters for Axe – more accustomed to four-round battles – not only the distance, but the quality of opponent, with Reavell himself looking to bounce back from a stoppage defeat in his last bout. It would see the aviator call on all his strength, bravery and ring craft to seal the narrow one-point decision, 77/76.

Having struggled to get to grips in the opening round with Reavell, who seemed to be reliant on a shock and awe tactic of quick

hands with one of two explosive punches, Axe picked up a cut above his right eye.

The RAF firefighter instructor said: “There was bit of everything I wanted; he has had 14 fights before and been in the ring with champions. I knew I’d have to dig deep.

“I was making him miss a lot, and then I hit with three punches to his one. It was close, I knew I had the power to worry him, but I had to work with the cut and stop it opening up more.”

Reavell’s attempt to rough up the cut and use plenty of antics – from shouting and berating to unsettle him – worked to some degree, but

Axe continued with his plan of sustained attacks, utilising upper cuts and hooks. By the third

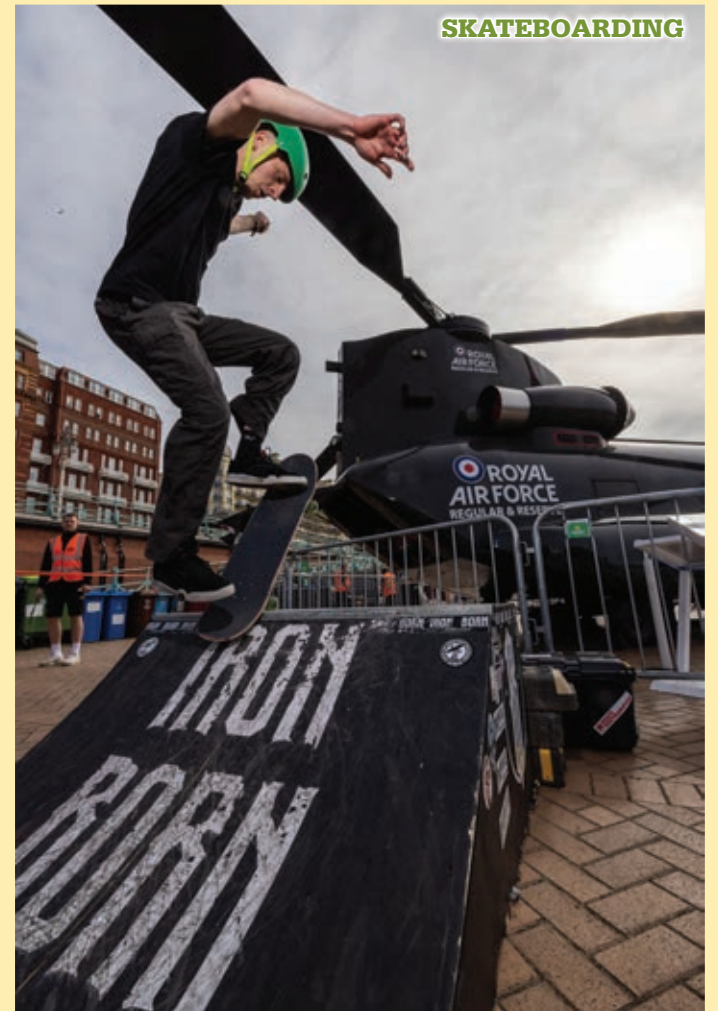
round the aviator was seemingly behind on the score card, but Reavell had been missing plenty of follow-up or long-range punches, as Axe moved well and began to introduce some savage body punches and combinations – scoring vital points on the judge’s card.

The fight seemed in reverse order as Axe, not used to this new distance, would have to work until the end now after the staggered start and a bloody nose at the beginning of round four and more blood above his right eye.

Round four and five went the way of the airman, slowing the fight down to get inside Reavell’s defence and picking up further points – his accuracy above that of his opponent.

Two big opening punches to rounds seven and eight belied Axe’s inexperience at this distance and an upper cut and huge right secured the penultimate round and the win.

● Follow Axe on Facebook @brad.axe.7



SKATEBOARDING

SEA THIS: RAF boarder shows his skill, and coaching a youngster, inset below

Brighton rocks for RAF skaters

THERE WAS sun, sea and skateboarding in Sussex as Service skateboarders helped promote the RAF during Op Cloudburst.

The RAF Town Show Brighton, hosted by RAF Recruitment, attracted thousands of visitors over its two days with boarders Flt Lt Charlie Turnbull, Sgt Will Drummee, Cpl George Phipp and Cpl Dom Brown on hand to demonstrate their skills.

Brown, from Benson, said: “It’s a real privilege to showcase skateboarding within the RAF, especially here in Brighton. As something I have been passionate about for decades, being able to share it with others in and out of the service is incredible and humbling.”

The event formed part of Op Cloudburst, aimed at

raising the profile of the RAF, engaging with the public and educating the local population on the career and wider opportunities available within the Service.

The skate team members coached almost 100 people of all ages over the weekend in the fundamentals of skateboarding as the push continues to make skateboarding an official sport within the RAF.

Boarders within the RAF meet for monthly sessions around the UK, and the next Tri-Service competition is in Flo Skatepark, Derby in October.

Brown added: “The invite is open to anyone who wishes to get involved, no matter the ability, we are always looking for new members to the sport and association. Anyone interested should check us out on Instagram:

@royalairforceskateboarding.”



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Sport

ICE HOCKEY

A silver lining for Lossie Jets

Daniel Abrahams

ICE HOCKEY'S Lossie Jets won a silver and secured promotion during their recent final berth at the Scottish Ice Hockey Bowl in Dumfries.

Ten teams did battle at the fourth-tier event, split into two round robin pools. Lossie, in Pool A, faced Renfrew Ravens, The Kraken, Galloway Grizzlies and Coatbridge Redwings.

Going unbeaten in the group stage, the aviator team of LCpl Philip Woolfy (51 Sqn), A/Cpl Morgan Wilson (DSF), Cpl Barry Stewart (MT), Flt Lt Paul Clarke (OC DSF and OIC), Cpl Mel Murphy (TSW), AS1 Jordan Nash (ISTAR Supply), Sgt Billy Rogers (203 Sqn) and Cpl Ben McKenzie (GSS) were then pitted against Ayrshire Vikings in the semi-final.

Continuing their strong weekend in style, Lossie won the first semi-final 6-3 to book their place in the final.



AIR POWER: Lossie Jets SMITHY PHOTOGRAPHY

Having won their semi-final 4-0 over The Kraken, Hamilton Hawks proved too strong for the Service side, winning 6-2 to lift the trophy, with both teams gaining promotion.

A team spokesperson said: "Although the Jets came away with second place, our spirits have not been dented as

we have earned promotion to the next tier of recreational hockey – a fitting prize for a well-played tournament.

"Rounding off our success and showcasing the team's sportsmanship, we also won the Fair Play Award, while A/Cpl Wilson was Keeper of the Tournament."

HOCKEY

County Champs triumph

SERVICE HOCKEY was five-alive as UKAF men stormed to glory at the England Hockey County Championships for the first time in their history.

The thrilling campaign against some of the strongest sides in the country, at Nottingham Hockey Centre, ended with a nail-biting 5-4 win on penalties, after the game ended in deadlock at 2-2.

Five RAF stars – Cpl Owen Stephenson, Cpl Sam Nutt, AS1 Liam Connelly, Sgt Kyle Barnes, Sgt Terry Kynaston and Team Manager Flt Lt Andrew Seimann – were part of the Tri-Service team, with Cpl Stephenson scoring in the final and Kynaston and Nutt stroking in two penalties.

RAF hockey spokesperson Cpl James Havlin said: "This historic achievement is a testament to the team's resilience, unity and belief throughout the tournament.



RAF CONTINGENT: (From left) Cpl Owen Stephenson, Cpl Sam Nutt, AS1 Liam Connelly, Sgt Kyle Barnes, Sgt Terry Kynaston and Team Manager Flt Lt Andrew Seimann

"It marks a landmark moment for UKAF Hockey and sets a new benchmark for the future."

Competing in England's longest-running hockey competition, UKAF faced a formidable challenge, lining up against nine high quality teams and beating Shropshire 20-1 in the opening clash, with Stephenson netting, before a repeat scoreline against Yorkshire, with Nutt and Barnes supplying the goals.

A narrow loss to a resilient Isle of Man side tested early resolve, but the team responded superbly, drawing a dramatic final pool match against Nottinghamshire 3-3, with Connelly and Barnes netting.

A fiercely contested semi-final against Warwickshire ended 3-2 in favour of the Service side, before a final of nerves and endurance, which would be decided on penalties, with UKAF scoring all five to lift the title.

TENNIS

Development stars ace it at Portsmouth



NET GAINS: Men's Development Team with the championship trophy

AN AMAZING one-two of Inter-Service Development wins saw the RAF kickstart the season in style at the Royal Navy's Portsmouth Tennis Academy.

With the ladies' squad looking to retain their title and the men seeking to gain revenge after losing out in 2025, the championships promised to be something special.

The opening day singles saw RAF men's number one seed Flt Lt Phil Lawton fight off a spirited Army comeback, finishing with a 6-1, 3-6, 6-1 win. He could not back the match up against his Royal Navy opponent, losing that encounter.

RAF ladies top seed Fg Off Sophia Anderson beat her Army opponent 6-2, 6-0, she then followed this up in her next match easily beating a Navy player to put the ladies on a 100 per cent record going into the number two seed matches.

Men's number 2 seed AS1 Javiel Ma took to the court to try and edge a lead for his teammates. His first match saw him ease past his RN opponent 6-4, 6-3 before winning his second match against the Army 6-3, 6-0.

Ladies number 2 seed Sqn Ldr Emma Brooks won 6-0, 6-0 over her Navy opponent, before losing to an Army player, leaving the women equal with the Army on three wins each after the first day with the hosts yet to register a win. In the men's competition the aviators led the Army by one game, 3 to 2, with RN on one win.

Day two saw the women's team



BORN TO SERVE: Female aviator

win the doubles through number two seeds Wg Cdr Sophie Atkinson and Air Cdre Fin Bradley. They took to the court to face the Army, beating them with ease 6-1 6-3, they then moved on to the Navy and dispatched them with relative ease 7-6 6-1.

With the Army and the RAF both sitting on six wins each, all hopes rested on the final match between the Army and Navy, which the hosts took to hand the RAF the women's title.

Sgt Adam Betts and AS1 Marcus Watling then won 6-0 6-3 over a Navy pairing, before a tactical switch saw AS1 Ma and Sgt Ben Simpkin secure the men's crown with a 7-6, 6-1 win.

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5 RAF Sport

pages of



Cpl steps up a level in latest pro fight



See p25

RUGBY UNION

Cokayne try seals W6N Grand Slam

Flt Lt scores in every game as England storm to title

Daniel Abrahams

FLT LT Amy Cokayne sealed Red Roses history when she scored the final try to beat France 43-28 and record an historic eighth consecutive Women's Six Nations title for England.

The hooker, who scored in every game in the campaign, said: "Going to France for a Championship decider was unreal. The atmosphere was a cauldron, hostile, but I loved it. That kind of environment really drives me on and brings the best out of me."

Cokayne, who took the vice-captain's armband at the beginning of the tournament, went on to score six tries, second highest in the tournament, as England claimed their fifth Grand Slam in a row.

She added: "We knew exactly what was coming from France, their physicality is always a huge part of their game, and we had to meet that head on. I thought we did that from the start."

"To score and help seal the win was an incredible feeling.



LE CRUNCH: Flt Lt Amy Cokayne takes a hard French tackle during the tournament decider

You could hear the crowd straightaway, a real wall of noise, and I couldn't resist giving them

a bit of stick back. It's all part of playing in places like that and something I really enjoyed.

"It's hard to put into words what this group has achieved. Five Grand Slams in a row is

something really special."

The aviator sparked the team's winning campaign with their opening try of the tournament at the Allianz Stadium, sparking a 33-12 bonus point win over Ireland, scoring again against Scotland in the Red Roses second game, an 84-7 win at Murrayfield.

She crossed the try line again as the Roses subdued Wales 62-24 at Ashton Gate in round three of the tournament. A brace of tries came for the aviator in round four with a 61-33 win over Italy in Parma, to set up the thrilling finale against France.

She said: "There's a real belief in this squad, no matter who comes in. We keep pushing each other and that's what keeps driving us forward."

She added: "Knowing I've got the full support of the Royal Air Force when I pull on an England jersey means everything to me. It's not always easy competing in these big competitions, but the RAF have backed me the whole way and made it possible. I'm really proud to represent both my country and my Service."

Disappointment in the Inters

KINGSHOLM IN Gloucester provided a one-two of Inter-Service defeats for the RAF's men's and women's rugby union players as they both lost to the Army to end the 2026 championship.

A 52-12 loss did not reflect some of the scintillating rugby played by the aviator women, who were chasing the title for the first time since 2017, after beating the Royal Navy 36-7 in their opening match.

Head coach Sgt Sian Williams said: "The scoreline didn't really reflect the performance.

There were some outstanding individual and team displays.

"We're in transition, building strength and depth within the squad, and the new caps really stood out."

Williams' charges jumped into an early lead through Fg Off Ella Johnson in the opening minutes, with AS1 Daisy Fahey converting.

Johnson scored a brace to make it 12-5, but they could not hold out, going in level at the break.

Skipper Flt Lt Lucy Nye said: "We are gutted with the final

scoreline. On the flip side, it's been some of the best IS rugby that's ever been played. That first half could have gone either way, the Army have not been challenged like that, they will be beaten, so why not us who beats them?"

The men's team, having lost their opener 47-16 to the Royal Navy, could not hold a rampant Army team in the dead rubber clash, losing 20-38.

The aviators fought to the end, rallying in both halves with scores.

Skipper Cpl Mark Williams said: "We were disappointed



ATTACK: Cpl Orla Proctor

Photo: Army Rugby Union © Cat Goryn, Alligin

with how we performed across the campaign. We certainly showcased more of what we are

capable of in the fixture against the Army and I'm proud of how we stuck in the fight."



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R'n'R



Win!



Win story of the Hawk ● p5

Operation Mincemeat – the musical

● See pages 4-5

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Theatre

A Beautiful Thread

UK tour Go to: hamblett.com for details

The Lesser-known work of author Thomas Hardy

Actor Anton's delight in sharing musicality and poetry of literary great

THOMAS MORE in *Wolf Hall*, Chief Superintendent Bright in *Endeavour*, Harold Macmillan in *The Crown* and Qyburn in *Game of Thrones* – Anton Lesser is known for stand-out roles on TV.

He's also one of the country's best-known voices, having worked extensively for BBC Radio (including starring as the Roman detective Falco) and recorded many audiobooks. He is an Associate of the Royal Shakespeare Company and appears in the HBO Harry Potter series, playing the role of the wandmaker Ollivander, due to premiere in December.

Now he's on tour in *A Beautiful Thread* which tells the story of Thomas Hardy's life in the writer's own words, through his poetry, letters and novels including *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and *Jude the Obscure*.

In the Words and Music production, Lesser and Lucia Bonbright bring a varied cast to life: from Hardy's characters, Hardy himself, his mother Jemima and his wives, Emma and Florence, to George Bernard Shaw and Virginia Woolf.

Hardy put more music in his novels than any other writer, and Orchestra of the Swan's Artistic Director David Le Page has devised a musical programme that ranges from classical music, including Holst and Warlock, to contemporary folk, performed live by on-stage musicians from Orchestra of the Swan.

Lesser said: "Words and Music is a kind of unique genre, neither pure reading, nor acting, but with an immediacy that comes from the huge



emotional impact the music has upon the words, and vice versa, and the interplay we actors enjoy with the musicians on stage. Quite simply, it's the most enjoyable thing I've ever done."

A Beautiful Thread goes to the Lighthouse Poole (June 25), Hall for Cornwall, Truro (July 2) and Thorington Theatre, Saxmundham, Suffolk (July 18) and continues touring throughout the year.

"It's such a privilege to be reading this amazing writing and this fantastic poetry and also to be in the company of these master practitioners, these musicians who are so wonderful. It's a great joy to do," Lesser added.

"It's a blend of narration, we read from Hardy's poetry and bits of biography, things that people have said about him, things he said about himself and about his work, and the music underscores the narration. But it also weaves in and out of the actors dropping in and out of characters, so at any one time I'm Hardy as an older man, then I'm young Thomas. The whole thing is very organic and it flows in a spontaneous way, it's just lovely."

Lesser revealed that he wasn't a particular Hardy fan before working on *A Beautiful Thread*.

He said: "The great revelation to me was the poetry. He started as a poet and wasn't very successful at first. Then he wrote novels serialised like Charles Dickens' were, and then Hardy became this huge international star. Some of the novels were dramatized, and one was even made into a very early film while he was still alive. Hardy's wonderful



THE ONLY WAY IS WESSEX: Lesser (above left) performs *A Beautiful Thread* at Stonehenge

PHOTOS: GERAINT LEWIS

poems were a complete surprise to me and I get to read some of the greatest."

Taking part in the Harry Potter series Lesser said was "very exciting." He added: "The sets were wonderful, the whole industry of it is extraordinary and I'm just honoured to be a part of it."

Before becoming a successful writer, Hardy trained and worked as an architect – a profession that Lesser also chose before he

became an actor. He explained: "I was very lucky, I was able to change my mind; I was going to be an architect and then decided I wanted to be an actor."

Lesser also takes part in a Words and Music show based on *Wolf Hall*. His daughter, Lilit, is also an actor, appearing as Princess Mary in the hit TV series of *Wolf Hall*.

The proud dad said: "It's a joy to me to be able to encourage Lil because they are so talented. It

was clear from when they were tiny they were unbelievably suited to this job so I've done nothing but say 'go for it'."

Lesser is also continuing to tour with the show *Red Sky at Sunset*, about another much-loved author and poet, Laurie Lee, which goes to London's Queen Elizabeth Hall (July 16) and The Sub Rooms, Stroud (July 17) with further dates to follow.

By Tracey Allen



Exhibitions

Whistler

Tate Britain, until September 27

Once-in-a-generation chance to experience full genius of Whistler

TATE BRITAIN is now staging Europe's largest retrospective of James McNeill Whistler's work in three decades. Bringing together 150 works of art, the exhibition, which runs until September 27, offers what's been called a once-in-a-generation opportunity to see the full breadth of his painting, drawing, printmaking and design, from the iconic *Portrait of the Artist's Mother* (a landmark loan from Musée d'Orsay, Paris) to a collection of nocturnes and previously unseen sketchbooks.

A spokesperson said: "It will also reveal how Whistler created his ethereal visions of modern life and foretold the future of modern art. Visitors will discover a defiantly experimental artist and cosmopolitan celebrity who disrupted Victorian society in the pursuit of truth, beauty and artistic progress."

The exhibition opens with a room inspired by Whistler's studio. Four major self-portraits are brought together from across his career, including *The Artist in His Studio* 1865-6, as well as two full-length portraits of fellow painter Maud Franklin. These are surrounded by Whistler's own collections of East Asian ceramics, Japanese prints and artist-designed furniture, as well as his easel, paint palette and brushes, evoking the artist's working environment and creative process.

The spokesperson explained: "Whistler was a truly global figure, forging a nomadic career that spanned four continents. For the very first time, his teenage years will be explored through the studies he made at the Imperial Academy of Arts, St Petersburg and the United States Military Academy, West Point. These include his earliest notebooks, which are displayed publicly for the first time.

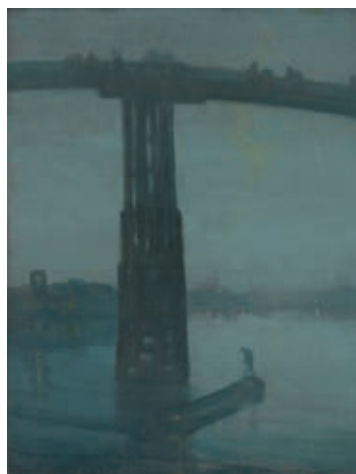
"After moving to Paris aged 21, Whistler embraced the vibrant, bohemian atmosphere of the city and, alongside young contemporaries like Edgar Degas, developed a



James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Arrangement in Grey and Black No.1*, commonly known as *Whistler's Mother*, 1871, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France



James McNeill Whistler, *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl*, 1864, Tate



James McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne: Blue and Gold - Old Battersea Bridge*, 1872-5, Tate

lifelong interest in working-class subjects and spaces. His etchings of modern life will be reassessed alongside his earliest oil paintings from nature, pictures of friends and self-portrait *Whistler Smoking* 1856-60, unseen since his death."

Whistler spent his late twenties crossing between Paris and London, pioneering

impressionist techniques and painting landscapes in the open air, including the French coast and the modern spectacle of the industrialised River Thames.

The exhibition will also host the largest assembly of Whistler's nocturne landscapes for more than 30 years.

● **Go to:** tate.org.uk for more information.

Rare opportunity to see many of artist's nocturne landscapes



Theatre

Operation Mincemeat

UK tour

Op Mincer but true Fl

THE AWARD-winning musical *Operation Mincemeat* is currently on a 40-week nationwide tour, running until November 28.

Reprising their acclaimed roles, West End alumnae Christian Andrews (*Sherlock Holmes* and *the 12 Days of Christmas*), Séan Carey (*The Play That Goes Wrong*), Charlotte Hanna-Williams (*Rogers & Hammerstein's Cinderella*), and Holly Sumpton (*Lovers Actually*) are joined by new recruit Jamie-Rose Monk (*Rome & Juliet*) to form the main cast.

It's 1943, and the Allied Forces are on the ropes. Luckily, they've got a trick up their sleeve. Well, not up their sleeve, per se, but rather inside the pocket of a stolen corpse. Equal parts farce, thriller, and Ian Fleming-style spy caper (with an assist from Mr Fleming himself), *Operation Mincemeat* tells the wildly improbable and hilarious true story of the covert operation that turned the tide of World War II.

The show began as a tiny London Fringe production in 2019 and quickly gained a devoted following, it premiered in the West End in May, 2023. The UK tour includes dates in Milton Keynes (June 8-13), Plymouth (June 29-July 4), Aberdeen (August 11-15), High Wycombe (September 28-October 3) and Norwich (October 5-10).

Who could have imagined that the most uproarious musical in years would find its zany inspiration from James Bond?

"We just had been devouring every kind of source we could for telling the story of *Operation Mincemeat*," Felix Hagan recalled, "and we'd come to this realisation that it chimed every macabre, sick, twisted bell in all our horrible heads."

Hagan is a member of SplitLip, the madcap comedy collective that in 2017 came up with a wild premise: turning the tale of an

improbably brash British wartime escapade into an improbably brash British musical. And that what would seal the deal early on was that one of the real-life characters in the tale of this mind-boggling gambit – a major WWII turning point for the Allies – was none other than the author-creator of Agent 007.

"By miles, the funniest thing that we could think of at the start was that Ian Fleming was involved," Hagan noted.

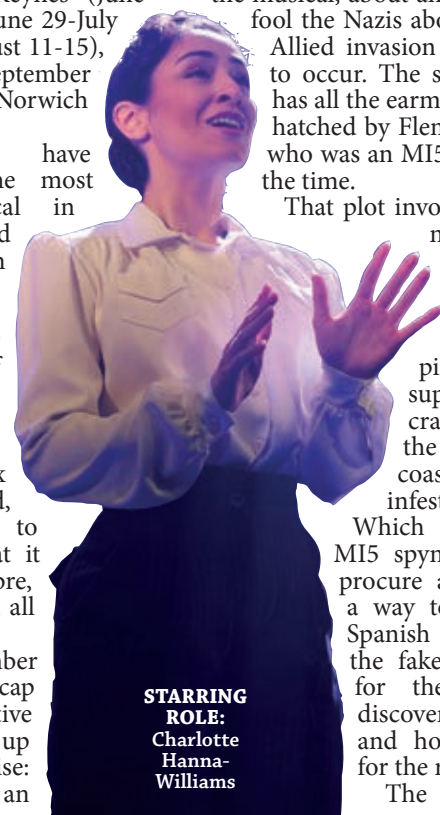
And off Hagan went with the other SplitLip members – Natasha Hodgson, Zoë Roberts and David Cumming – on a creative binge that would eventually lead to London's West End, and then to Broadway.

To Roberts, who along with her SplitLip partners collaborated on the show's book and score, the surprise and pleasure of the project has been its multi-generational appeal. "There's something really joyful in the success of *Mincemeat*," she observed, "and that has been the breadth of the age ranges, the backgrounds, the genders who enjoy it, and that, you know, that's great."

For those who have yet to sample *Mincemeat*, a brief tutorial: Five actors play more than 80 roles in the musical, about an MI5 plan to fool the Nazis about where an Allied invasion of Italy was to occur. The story, in fact, has all the earmarks of a plot hatched by Fleming himself, who was an MI5 operative at the time.

That plot involves planting misleading invasion plans on the body of an Allied pilot who supposedly has crashed into the sea off the coast of Nazi-infested Spain. Which means the MI5 spymasters must procure a body, find a way to plop it in Spanish waters with the fake plans, wait for the Nazis to discover the body – and hope they fall for the ruse.

The story is



STARRING ROLE: Charlotte Hanna-Williams

Edited by Executive Features Editor Tracey Allen

Minceat: macabre Fleming spy ruse

Bond creator had part in WWII ploy



DESK JOB: Holly Sumpton plays Ewen Montagu
PHOTOS: MATT CROCKETT

demonstrably true, down to the fact that the Germans were completely duped, leading them to move their forces to the wrong site of the supposed invasion. This paved the way for the Allies to launch, virtually unimpeded, a campaign to recapture Italy.

Of course, the musical is a witty riff on this beguilingly clever bit of spycraft. But the emotions it rouses, undergirding the ordeal of WWII, go deeper for British audiences. “For everyone that went to school here, that’s something that they would have covered,” said Christian Andrews, who plays the prim, kindly secretary Hester (and other characters).

“My great auntie loved telling us about the war – I think she must have been 16 or something when WWII started. I adored sitting down and listening to her.”

It is the essence of that idea, of gathering round to be regaled by a mesmerising bit of history, that *Operation Minceat* bottles so well. And all the more astonishing,



OP MINCEMEAT: Light-hearted musical

because the SplitLip posse had never written a musical before.

As Roberts noted, the group chose this narratively-rich source material “because we wanted to do something with a bit more commercial appeal” than some of the weirder, cabaret-style work through which SplitLip had gained a cult following.

“We approached every number completely with a clean slate as to what is the correct musical palette for this one song,” said Cumming, who originated the role of Charles

Cholmondeley, the nerdy MI5 conceiver of the subterfuge. “And so, we were less thinking about who’s going to be watching it; we were like, what does the story require in this moment, for this moment to be the best it possibly can be?”

Alongside Andrews, Holly Sumpton, Seán Carey, and Charlotte Hanna-Williams return from the West End production to reprise their roles in the touring cast, joined by Monk.

The musical ricochets from one emotional tone to another, from moments detailing little human absurdities during wartime, to evocations of the monumental human toll.

Or as Hodgson put it, speaking as much about life as about *Operation Minceat*: “Things can go from being funny to tragic in a room, every day of your life.”

Interview by Peter Marks, former chief theatre critic of The Washington Post

● Go to: Operationminceat.com for full tour details.



Music

The Buena Vista Orchestra
indigo at the O2, Feb 6, 2027

Cuban beats at indigo

LED BY the virtuoso Cuban violinist Rolando Morejón Reyes, The Buena Vista Orchestra features a line-up of highly accomplished musicians, including members from the original Buena Vista Social Club performances alongside those who have featured in the Afro-Cuban All Stars as well as the bands of Celia Cruz, Omara Portuondo, Chucho Valdés and Willie Colon.

Mixing classics from the Buena Vista Social Club catalogue with other classics and fan favourites from the Latin American songbook, The Buena Vista Orchestra will play a rare London show at indigo at The O2 on February 6, 2027.

Morejón Reyes said: “I am very excited to be coming to London and the UK, where we will share our Cuban homeland rhythms and rhymes and all the Cuban music genres with British music lovers.”

Steven Machat, the influential music industry veteran and founder of their label SSK Records, added: “This orchestra is one of the finest groups of musicians I have ever had the



LOOKING GOOD: Buena Vista line-up

opportunity to work with on any level. The show encompasses all the various musical styles that began in Cuba, from son to rumba to cha-cha-cha to salsa and more. This concert will have you on your feet dancing and moving from start to finish.”

The ensemble’s highly anticipated forthcoming studio album, scheduled for release this summer, showcases their signature blend of traditional Cuban rhythms with contemporary influences and virtuosic musicianship.

The album was recorded between Philadelphia and Miami and features the voice of Omara Portuondo on the focus track *Chan Chan*.

● Goto: thebuenvistaorchestra.com/tour for more details.



Books

BAE Hawk
amberley-books.com

Win!

50 years of Hawk jet

IT WAS 50 years ago that the BAE Hawk jet trainer was first delivered to the RAF – in November 1976. Since then the aircraft has been used extensively by the Air Force (and the Royal Navy) and is still in service with the Red Arrows Aerobatic Team and in the advance flying training role.

The Hawk has been an export success for the UK aviation industry, with worldwide sales ranging from Australia to Finland, to the Middle and the Far East. The final Hawks produced were delivered to Qatar in 2022.

The aircraft was designed by a team from Hawker Siddeley – one of their aims was to produce an aircraft that could be assembled by the purchasing country’s aviation industry.

The Hawk has evolved over the years to meet customer needs, resulting in the development of a number of versions. As well as the original

two-seat trainer, a single-seat ground-attack version was produced.

In his new book *BAE Hawk, Fifty Years of Service* (amberley-books.com), Mike Phipp says: “BAE regarded the Hawk as the world’s most successful and proven military aircraft trainer.” He examines the Hawk’s

design, evolution and worldwide use over the last half-century. The book includes previously-unseen illustrations.

You could win a copy of this fascinating title. For your chance to own one, answer the following question correctly:

Who designed the Hawk jet trainer?

Email your answer, marked BAE Hawk book competition, to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or post it to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE, to arrive by June 12.

Please remember to include your full postal address with your competition entry.





Your Announcements

You can email photos for announcements on this page to:
tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk

Deaths

DAVIES John Irfon Wg Cdr CBE MBE RAF (Ret'd), passed away in March aged 95. Born in Penclawdd, Swansea, on June 8, 1930, he joined the RAF through National Service and trained as a navigator. His service took him overseas during the early decades of the Cold War, with postings including Egypt, Singapore and Bahrain.

During his career he developed expertise in Middle Eastern affairs, having learned Arabic while stationed in Egypt, and later worked in connection with Whitehall's Middle East section. His service also included work relating to bomber navigation and operational development during a period of rapid change in RAF strategic operations.

In recognition of his contribution to the RAF he was appointed MBE in 1963. He also served as an instructor at the flying course in Cranwell, contributing to the training and professional development of RAF officers. He later attained the rank of Wg Cdr. Following his retirement from the RAF he embarked on a second career in the Civil Service, eventually settling in Radyr, Cardiff, where he served as Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Wales and later held senior posts connected with health and agriculture policy. For his contribution to public service he was subsequently appointed CBE.

Beyond his professional life John remained active in sport, particularly golf and fly-fishing, and was also a longstanding Freemason.

MORRIS Wg Cdr David George Morris RAF (Ret'd), aged 84, gently slipped away on 9 May 2026 after a short stay in hospital. The keystone of the Morris family and the yin to surviving wife Maureen's yang – a pilot (Valiants (90 Sqn), Vulcans (617 & 9 Sqn), QFI - 3 FTS (Jet Provost), KC135

(USAF)) and a genuinely good bloke. A Shropshire boy done good – incredibly hardworking, amassed a lifetime of remarkable experiences and memories, and throughout remained humble and deeply devoted to his family. He loved Dorset and "The Mill" while always staying proud of his Salop roots. Rest in peace. Thank you for everything. Funeral 1130hrs May 28, Weymouth Crematorium. Family Flowers – donations to Dementia UK and RAFA.

WEBB AEP (Tony) Wg Cdr AFC BA (Hones) died on April 19 aged 83. Tony will be remembered for his work in the fledgling Hercules Special Forces Squadron at Lyneham and his time during the Rhodesia/Zimbabwe campaign in 1979-80, for which he was awarded the AFC. He also spent many years as Press Liaison for the Royal International Air Tattoo.



Tony leaves his wife Marie and their combined children and grandchildren. A private cremation has already taken place, but a memorial service will be held at 2pm on June 10 at Newtown Church near Newbury, RG20 9AP. Family flowers only but donations are welcome in Tony's name to the RAF Benevolent Fund and Basingstoke Hospital.



Wg Cdr Tony Webb

Seeking

I would be very keen to hear from any former members of Number 44G State Enrolled Nurse Course who undertook their programme of Nurse Education at RAF Hospital Ely (as it was at that time) between 1971 and 1973. Please email: retiredraf8030192@gmail.com. Paul Elliott P8030192, served between 1971 and 1985.

I am trying to trace my brother, ex-FS R.E Lee (Bob) born in Sleights, N Yorks, March 1945-6, enlisted in RAF 1960 from West Sleekburn in Northumberland, was in the Telecommunication Branch. Last known posting was Brize Norton and he may have lived in the Oxford area, he would have served for 22 years.

I have visited the UK a few times and tried to contact him without any luck. I would be grateful if anyone that knew him could contact me, Norman Lee, on: argemtis71@gmail.com.

DO you know anyone who trained at one of the six British Flying Training Schools in America in World War II? The Falcon Field Association: The Next Generation is holding its next annual event in Edinburgh on October 3-4. This year we are widening our invitation to include anyone connected with any of the BFTSs. If you learned to fly at a BFTS or are related to a pilot who trained there, we'd love to hear from you! Please contact Kathryn Masters by email: falconfieldassociationtng@gmail.com or mobile: 07885 378090.

Associations

RAF Bawdsey Reunion Association. Have you ever served at RAF Bawdsey? If so, why not join our Association and come to our next Annual Reunion at Bawdsey Manor on Saturday, June 6. Please contact Doreen Calver on: doreen.bawdseyreunion@btinternet.com or call: 0751 3301 723.

591 SU Association. In its 72nd year of existence, 591 Signal Unit has established an Association (better late than never!).

Ex-members and currently serving members of 591 SU are invited to visit the Association's website at: 591suassociation.co.uk for membership details and news of the next annual reunion along with other upcoming events for 2026.

IF you trained as an RAF Administrative Apprentice (or you are related to one) we would be delighted to welcome you to the RAFAA Association. Please see: rafadappasn.org; or you can contact the Membership Secretary on: 07866 085834 or contact the Chairman on: 01933 443673.

THE Association of RAF Women Officers (ARAFWO) is a lively, friendly, world-wide networking group. Please visit our website: arafwo.co.uk and discover the benefits of membership, plus see what activities and events we offer all over the world.

Reunions

309 Entry RAF Hereford C Flt 4 Sqn Cooks, April 1967 to May 1968. If anyone knows anybody from that Entry and wants to get in touch, with a view to meeting for a 60th anniversary celebration in 2027, please call Ian Dell on: 01202 722058

ALL ex Clk Secs who were trained on the Apprentice Wing at RAF Credenhill in the 1960s and 1970s are cordially invited to email: David.tibbett@ntlworld.com with a view to arranging a reunion this year.

IBCC concert

A concert telling the story of the International Bomber Command Centre (IBCC) will be held at Louth St James' Church from 7.30pm to 9.30pm on Saturday, July 4, led by Musical Directors Clare Bauckham and Greta Marshall and hosted by former BBC Radio Lincolnshire presenter Melvyn Prior.

The repertoire will include the premiere performance of the poem *Remember*, by John Roy Walsh, set to music by Clare, a teacher at Branston Community Academy, and an orchestral piece written by IBCC musician Rachel Williams.

The evening will include wartime singalong favourites such as *Nightingale* and *Dambusters*, combined with more modern pieces. These will be interspersed with poignant poems and readings reflecting the concert's theme of Voices from the Past, Present and Future

The IBCC Events programme raises money to support the charity's work with Learning and Outreach. Organisers are asking for a £10 minimum voluntary contribution from audience members as an admission fee to cover both the costs and raise essential funds to support the IBCC's Learning programmes available online via IBCC at: Internationalbcc.co.uk/visit/events.

The IBCC choir and orchestra support the annual Remembrance service and Christmas Concerts at the Centre and are seeking new members, particularly viola and cello players and bass singers. Email: music@internationalbcc.co.uk for more details.

How to use our service

There is no charge for conventionally-worded **birth, engagement, marriage, anniversary, death, in memoriam seeking and reunion** notices. For commercial small ads contact Edwin Rodrigues on: 07482 571535.

We cannot, under any circumstances, take announcements over the telephone. They can be sent by email to: tracey.allen@rafnews.co.uk or by post to: **Announcements, RAF News, Room 68, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, HP14 4UE.**

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Battle of Britain Service

THE MINISTRY of Defence has announced that the 86th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain Service of Thanksgiving and Rededication will be held in Westminster Abbey at 11am on Sunday, September 20.

Applications for tickets, stating all names, addresses, telephone number/email address, place and date of birth, passport or driving licence number of individuals wishing to attend, should be made in writing and are to be accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope.

Applications should reach Mr Chris Rothwell, SO3 RAF Ceremonial Support, RAF Ceremonial Office, Bentley Priory Building, RAF Northolt, West End Road, Ruislip, Middlesex, HA4 6NG by July 10.

To assist with seating in the Abbey, applicants are requested to state which of the following categories is appropriate: relatives of aircrew or groundcrew who served in the Battle of Britain; past or present members of the Royal Air Force and its Reserve Forces; members of the Emergency Services or ground support staff during the Battle; or member of the general public.

Please state if you are a wheelchair user.

Tickets, and a note on dress and timings for the occasion, will be issued two weeks before the Service.

Applications are not to be made to Westminster Abbey.

Air Loadmasters pay tribute to fallen

A SERVICE and dedication of the Crested Air Loadmaster floor plaque at St Clements Danes, the RAF church in The Strand, was held recently, led by the resident Chaplain Reverend (Wg Cdr) Ashley Mitchell.

The RAF Air Loadmaster Association (ALMA) padre Reverend (Sqn Ldr) Rebekah Cannon participated in the service and led the blessing of the floor plaque, accompanied by ALMA's patron, chairman and president.

Also present for the blessing was the Association's oldest member, Mike Garner, who at 94 still takes part in the remembrance parades and other ALMA social activities.

ALMA treasurer Les Weston said: "During the service our Remembrance tribute to our fallen was led by our Chairman David Lester.

"The *Last Post* was played by a trumpeter from the RAF Band, RAF Music Services. Following the solemn two minutes silence

the trumpeter roused us with *Reveille*."

The service and dedication were the main event of a weekend of special events marking the Association's 25th anniversary this month.

Mr Weston added: "A group of 42 members were given a tour of the Houses of Parliament, courtesy of MP Calvin Bailey and his executive assistant Mia Ballantyne on the Friday afternoon.

"On Saturday our next event was a trip on the Thames by an Uber boat to the Tower of London, where we were met by Lisa Garland, a yeoman warder and former member of the RAF, who regaled us with some of the history and stories of this fascinating building that, like ALMA, has stood the test of time.

"In the evening a gala dinner was held at the RAF Club, sponsored by our patron, Sir Andrew Pulford.

"This venue is steeped in RAF



REMEMBRANCE: Resident Chaplain Rev (Wg Cdr) Ashley Mitchell led the service and dedication at the RAF church, St Clement Danes. *Inset*, a close-up of the floor plaque PHOTOS: RAF Northolt

history and tradition and was the perfect setting for an evening of celebration and remembrance for all those who served and

are serving as air loadmasters. We were privileged to have Ann Bihan and Sandy Butler, two of the founder members of the ALM

Association, present with us for this celebration. We had music provided by the RAF Salon Orchestra, RAF Music Services."

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R'n'R



Prize Crossword No. 410

Solve the crossword, then rearrange the 8 letters in yellow squares to find an RAF aircraft.

Across

- 7. What remains after fire strike on religious retreat (6)
- 8. Exist, own, do your best! (6)
- 10. Her coal causes disease (7)
- 11. Reform Green Labour, say (5)
- 12. Royal Artillery, for example, returns wrath (4)
- 13. Charles joins 1000 in void (5)
- 17. We embrace Henry where Jonah once was (5)
- 18. RAF aircraft goes up, back to a degree (4)
- 22. Alabama will take up weapons in fright (5)
- 23. **And 3 Down.** Employs magic wrongly in sporting contest (7,5)
- 24. Shooting star encountered queen holding duck (6)
- 25. Kindly Franklin and I outside garden (6)

Down

- 1. Mother and Mark use a cosmetic...(7)
- 2. ...during the endless 'Rocky' (7)
- 3. **See 23 Across**
- 4. Agency worker is French hurricane (7)
- 5. Cavalry sword on RAF plane (5)
- 6. Guardiola gives heartless yes to diarist (5)
- 9. Fatal horn blown at station (3,6)
- 14. Cleaner first soaks hair and marches poor Oliver outside (7)
- 15. Squash fruit (7)
- 16. This RAF team comes down in formation (7)
- 19. Ham for father of Royal Military Academy (5)
- 20. Spend recklessly on Western Australian road going east (5)
- 21. Some equerry derogatory to golf cup (5)

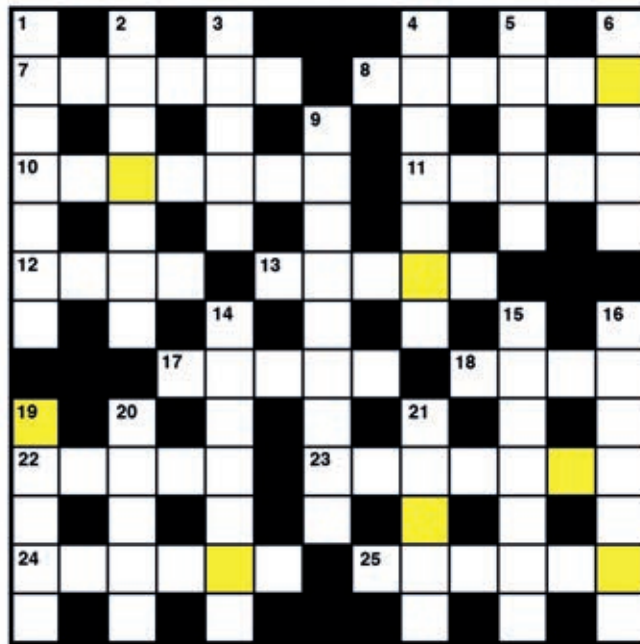
Name:

Address:

.....

RAF aircraft: Crossword No. 410

The winners of our Prize Crossword and Prize Su Doku puzzles will receive a recent top aviation title – please send your entries to the address printed in the adjacent Su Doku panel, to arrive by June 12, 2026.



Across – 1. Sped 8. Uneducated 9. Keflavik 10. Boss 12. Skewer 14. Merlin 15. Violas 17. Thrust 18. Merc 19. Reassure 21. Blitzkrieg 22. Home
Down – 2. Paperknife 3. Duel 4. Beaver 5. Bunkum 6. Canberra 7. Ides 11. Slipstream 13. Wildcats 16. Stroke 17. Tragic 18. Mobs 20. Sigh
Airbase – RAF Akrotiri

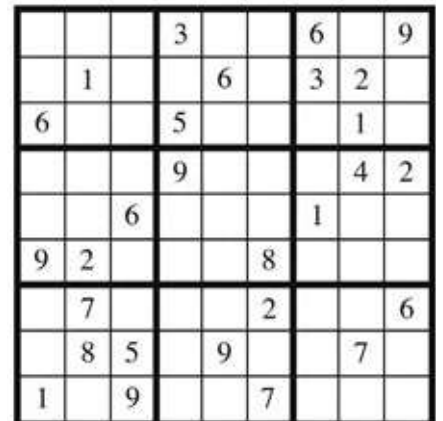
Prize Crossword No. 408 winner is: Mr John Maw, Leeds.



Prize Su Doku No. 420

Fill in all the squares in the grid so that each row, each column and each 3x3 square contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

Solutions should be sent in a sealed envelope marked 'Su Doku' with the number in the top left-hand corner to: RAF News, Room 68, Lancaster Building, HQ Air Command, High Wycombe, Bucks, HP14 4UE, to arrive by June 12, 2026. The winner of Su Doku No: 417 is: Gregory Head, High Wycombe.



Solution to Su Doku No. 419

6	2	8	5	7	9	3	1	4
1	7	5	4	3	6	2	9	8
9	3	4	1	2	8	6	5	7
7	4	6	2	5	3	9	8	1
3	5	1	8	9	4	7	6	2
8	9	2	6	1	7	4	3	5
5	1	9	7	6	2	8	4	3
2	8	3	9	4	1	5	7	6
4	6	7	3	8	5	1	2	9



Film Review

Fairyland (15)
In cinemas now

New starts in San Fran

AFTER LOSING her mother in a car crash, six-year-old Alysia (Nessa Dougherty) is taken by her father Steve to San Francisco – set in the mid-70s, it is a city of exciting change and chaos. Based on Alysia Abbott's memoir of the same name, *Fairyland* follows her upbringing in the shadow of her father as he undergoes his own personal awakening.

Scot McNairy plays Steve, a struggling writer who frames their move to California as one of opportunity: both for his poetry and, as it transpires, meeting men. School is an afterthought as they move into their first home, shared with artists and bohemians. He insists he isn't a neglectful parent but instead teaching independence, much to the chagrin of Steve's disapproving mother-in-law (Geena Davis, in a small role that is at times literally phoned in).

Set against a backdrop of Prop 6 protests and Harvey Milk initially, the film moves into the 80s where we see the devastating effect of the HIV crisis on the gay community, and people close to Steve. Now a teenager, Alysia (Emilia Jones) is less forgiving of her father's shortcomings and is set on finding her own social group, even continuing her studies in France (in the one of the film's most artificial sequences). Sadly, it is in this section of the film that the drama becomes increasingly heavy-handed. Despite its subject matter, *Fairyland* struggles to find a natural rhythm, often feeling rigid and forced. This leaves key moments feeling contrived and hard to engage with.

As the film builds toward reconciliation of father and daughter, it leans into forced sentiment that



LIBERATION: Steve and Alysia embark on a bohemian life

feels cheap and unearned. What should be a deeply personal story instead comes across as strangely hollow.

Two out of five roundels ●●
Review by Sam Cooney



Music

The Waterboys
Atlantic Rain

Waterboys unearthing 80s treasure

WITH A run of arena dates across Dublin, London and Glasgow this summer, The Waterboys have announced that *Atlantic Rain*, a three-disc set of previously unheard music from the classic *Fisherman's Blues* era, will be released on July 17. The first single from the album, *Too Close To Heaven*, is out now.

Consisting of 25 tracks, *Atlantic Rain* contains long-lost music recorded during the prodigious sessions for *Fisherman's Blues* (1986-88). During this period The Waterboys recorded almost 400 multi-track reels of music, many had no song titles on them, only notes like 'instrumental', 'unknown', 'soundcheck' or 'jam'.

Band leader Mike Scott finally went through these mysterious tapes in 2024-25 and found many long-forgotten release-worthy performances, including never before heard songs such as *Come*



BAND LEADER: Mike Scott

Back To Galway, *Light Shine On Me* and *Endless Store*, the epic *Man With The Wind At His Heels*, and covers of numbers by Dylan, Hank Williams, Woody Guthrie and Willie Nelson. These and many other lost treasures have been collected to create this set.

On its original release in 1988, *Fisherman's Blues* marked a change in direction for the band after their early alternative rock albums. Relocating to Ireland they embraced roots, country and Celtic music – and the palette also included soul, old-time gospel and instrumental explorations.

The Waterboys play arena dates in Glasgow on August 29, Dublin on September 5 and London on September 12.

● **Go to:** mikescottwaterboys.com for more info.

